

University of Alberta

Postmodern Strategies in
Salman Rushdie's *The Satanic Verses*
and
Nawal Saadawi's *The Fall of Imam*

By

Marlene E. Lewis



In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
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Department of Comparative Literature

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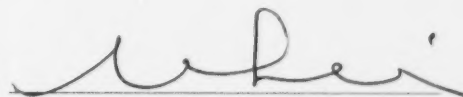
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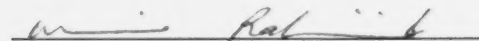
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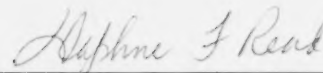
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Dr. S.H. Arnold
Supervisor



Dr. N. Rahimieh



Dr. D. Read

September 16, 1994

To my loves, Donovan and Lee

&

To my soul-mate

Abstract

This thesis explores the writing of Salman Rushdie and Nawal el Saadawi, two writers that position themselves in some way within the Eastern literary tradition. It contends that both *The Satanic Verses* and *The Fall of the Imam* display a postmodern form and a postmodern content. For the former, form, both novels problematize the issue of ontology, are anti-representational of a true and fixed reality. By creating multiple and competing zones and by employing techniques like multiple or non-endings, multiple storylines, non-linear time, and fragmented subjectivities, both novels destabilize the notion of a fixed and coherent reality. For the latter, content, both novels follow the crisis of representation in a different direction to critique the metanarrative of Islam. Rushdie critiques the unified and absolute authority of fundamental Islam and the authority of its interpreters, contesting and undermining Muhammad's sacred nature, and taking issue with the belief in the uncreated nature of the Quran. El Saadawi's feminist postmodernism leads her to critique Islam's negative representation of woman as body and, through a destruction of that image, to re-vision woman as voice and mind.

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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

Although the term postmodernism originated from western discourse, research indicates that it is becoming increasingly important in non-western contexts. Of interest to this thesis is postmodernism's linkage to Middle Eastern literary studies. In this thesis I contend that Egyptian writer Nawal el Saadawi, and Indo-Anglo writer Salman Rushdie, writers whose backgrounds are other than that of the mainstream of western culture, employ postmodernist strategies for their works *The Fall of the Imam* and *The Satanic Verses*. I explore postmodernism's relevance to the two novels in two ways. First, I account for the postmodern form of both novels using Brian McHale's theory of literary ontological landscapes and competing ontological 'worlds' or 'zones', and the accompanying postmodern textual devices that structure both texts; second, I explore the novels' critiques of Islam via François Lyotard's 'postmodern condition' or the rejection of absolute knowledge and metanarratives.

It is perhaps an understatement to say that the discussion of postmodernism is heterogenous and multifaceted. Since its initial emergence in western

theory, it is a term applied to a variety of cultural, intellectual and social practices, and it has come to denote concepts, local styles, periods, economic phases, objects, even tendencies. To date, no single definition claims widespread currency or acceptance. Dick Hebdige gives us some idea of the breadth of the term, or, as he says, the 'buzzword':

When it becomes possible for people to describe as *postmodern* the decor of a room, the design of a building, the diagnosis of a film, the construction of a record, or a 'scratch video', a television commercial, or an arts documentary, or the 'intertextual' relations between them, the layout of a page in a fashion magazine or critical journal, an anti-teleological tendency within epistemology, the attack on the 'metaphysics of presence', a general attenuation of feeling, the collective chagrin and morbid projections of a post-War generation of baby boomers confronting disillusioned middle age, the 'predicament' of reflexivity, a group of rhetorical tropes, a proliferation of surfaces, a new phase in commodity fetishism, a fascination for images, codes and styles, a process of cultural, political, or existential fragmentation and/or crisis, the 'de-centering' of the subject, an 'incredulity towards metanarratives', the replacement of unitary power axes by a plurality of power/discourse formations, the 'implosion of meaning', the collapse of cultural hierarchies, the dread engendered by the threat of nuclear self-destruction, the decline of the university, the functioning and effects of the new miniaturised technologies, broad societal and economic shifts into a 'media', 'consumer' or 'multinational' phase, a sense (depending on who you read) of 'placelessness' or the abandonment of placelessness ('critical regionalism') or (even) a generalised substitution of

spatial for temporal co-ordinates, when it becomes possible to describe all these things as *postmodern* (or more simply, using a current abbreviation, as 'post' or 'very post') then it's clear we are in the presence of a buzzword. (181-182)

Considering the above, Hebdige wonders whether its interdisciplinary nature renders postmodernism so elastic that it is in danger of collapsing in on itself. For all of that, though, to answer his own unspoken question about usefulness, Hebdige, via Raymond Williams, quickly acknowledges that "the more contradictorily nuanced a word is, the more likely it is to have formed the focus for historically significant debates, to have occupied a semantic ground in which something precious and important was felt to be embedded" (182). For the purposes of this thesis, the merits of postmodernism's complexity and its usefulness is its oppositional nature: opposition invites spaces of discourse, new spaces that open daily. While the theorists I call to my thesis — Lyotard, Foucault, Barthes — are western poststructural/postmodern theorists, I utilize their socio-cultural principles and ontological emphases to look at postmodernism's role in eastern literary studies.¹ As Agger believes, "The really important issue is how different theorists relate to the cultural and political present in a way that helps them make distinctions among different versions of truth, freedom, justice and beauty" (110).

¹ While the named theorists can be considered both poststructural and postmodern, in the words of Ben Agger, the two approaches, postmodernism and poststructuralism, are so inextricably linked at many levels as to make simplistic differentiations impossible or undesirable (Agger 1992 109). I take my approach from Agger's words.

As recent as a decade ago Douwe Fokkema expressed his belief that postmodernism has little place outside the luxurious western world and its literary tradition. In his "Concluding Observations" to *Exploring Postmodernism* published in 1987 as part of the 1985 XIth Congress of the International Comparative Literature Association (ICLA) he pronounces that postmodernism is unable to address a number of cultural problems in non-western contexts, that it is a condition of wealth with geographical and sociological boundaries (in the context of the ICLA, one must certainly speculate on his definition of 'international'). According to Fokkema:

The Postmodernist code can be linked to a particular way of life, common in the Western world, including part of Latin America. The literary preference for nonselection coincides with an "embarras du choix" offered by luxurious living conditions, which enable many people to have numerous options. The Postmodernist appeal to the imagination is out of place in the world of Ivan Denisovic, or in the People's Republic of China....Or, if we focused on another part of the world, the Postmodernist anti-empirical emphasis on imagination cannot provide an answer to the problem of religious fanaticism. (234)

Perhaps, a decade later, Fokkema would revise his belief since the postmodernist discourse has, indeed, gone beyond the parochial borders of the European communities via many paths. The aesthetics of specific communities, including literature, incorporate postmodernism in a number of ways, as one can see from the following cursory reconnaissance. In a current volume of

the *South Atlantic Quarterly* Frederic Jameson summarizes how the First International Conference on the Theory of the Visual Arts in Caracas, Venezuela (1992), explores the relationship between postmodernism and the contemporary visual arts of Latin America; in *Past the Last Post: Theorizing Post-Colonialism and Post-Modernism* (1990), editors Ian Adam and Helen Tiffin present thirteen essays that deal with the intersection of postmodern discourse and post-colonial discourse; in *Postmodernism and Japan* (1988), Masao Miyoshi and H.D. Harootunian summarize how postmodernism enters the realm of Japanese cultural discourse; in "Suicide and the Japanese Postmodern: A Postnarrative Paradigm?" (1990), Alan Wolfe explores postmodernism and its relation to Japanese suicide; in "The Postmodern (?) Misquote in the Poetry and Painting of Lo Ch'ing" (1991), Joseph Allen debates the presence/absence of postmodern tendencies in the work of Lo'Ching; in "Post, Post and Post. Or, Where is South African Literature in All This?" (1990), Annamaria Carusi talks of postmodernism and South African resistance literature; and in "Comic Politics and Politics of the Comic: Walter Abish's *Alphabetical Africa*" (1992), Anthony Schirato offers (essentially) a postmodernist reading of Abish's literary remapping of Africa. As the above suggests, the postmodern debate is no longer limited to the European and North American contexts. Rather, eschewing Fokkema's skepticism, postmodernism has flown beyond its nascent boundaries into cultural discourses around the globe.

Postmodern is, though, less prevalent within Islamic discourses. If one uses postmodernism as a periodizing term in the strictest sense of that which follows modernism, then postmodernism would seem to be meaningless in the context of cultures that have not undergone industrial and/or postindustrial phases. How is it possible, for example, to talk of Fredric Jamieson's cultural logic of late capitalism with regard to countries where illiteracy is ninety per cent, where national struggles for freedom from colonial rule are the norm rather than the exception?

Some writers concerned with the east have begun to explore links with postmodernism. In the collection of essays *The Anti-Aesthetic: Essays on Postmodern Culture* (1983), Edward Said debates the 'opponents, audiences, constituencies and community' of postmodernism. He asks "Who's postmodernism is it? And, will a western theory once again define the east?" He questions the connection between western theories like postmodernism and contextual politics, and sees the possibility of a postmodern linkage through "re-inventing history using photomontage to tell other stories than the official sequential or ideological ones produced by power" (158). In short, in line with his early work, he problematizes the representation of the East in the West, this time via postmodernism.

A second text, Michael M.J. Fischer and Mehdi Abedi's *Debating Muslims: Cultural Dialogues in Postmodernity and Tradition* (1990), is an initial foray into the issue of postmodernism for the Muslim world, predominately Iran,

where Fischer and Abedi focus on postmodernism as a period term, and as a concept that brings into being the idea of perspectival truth(s). Speaking as anthropologists, they turn their attention to late twentieth century western modernism and its relationship with Muslim culture, then highlight how postmodernism problematizes the notion of bounded cultures by its insistence on difference (xxxi - xxxiii). They talk of postmodernism's penchant for global interaction and intercultural dialogue, and demonstrate its relevance to a number of contexts, from life in Iranian villages, to Muslim immigrants in America, and finally to Salman Rushdie's *The Satanic Verses*. As anthropologists who speak to perspectival truth(s), Fischer and Abedi open many avenues that can be explored in yet further detail in future works on postmodernism and Islam.

A third text, Akbar S. Ahmed's *Postmodernism and Islam: Predicament and Promise* (1993), looks at western theories of postmodernism and how they may be useful to address the issue of religious fundamentalism as it is constructed by the global media. To explain Muslim resistance to postmodernism, he begins by explaining Muslim reception of modernism. On the one hand, he believes that some modernist terms are useful to leaders like Sir Sayyed, Iqbal, and Jinnah who wish to arm themselves as Muslims against colonial powers (30). On the other hand, he sees modernism translated by other Muslim leaders as a drive to acquire Western education, technology and industry, at the expense of those Islamic religious beliefs that may be in

conflict with modernism (31). If modernism's relationship to the east is so contentious, where does this leave postmodernism? Ahmed explains that its reception is far from unified. Writers like Manzoor (1990) and Abu-Rabi (1990) "dismiss it as a continuation of Western modernism, as destructive and doomed, equated to 'Americanization', nihilism', 'anarchy' and 'devastation'" (28). Ahmed, himself, is less condemning of postmodernism. He insists that critics who reject postmodernism in "incomprehension and anger" miss its wit and irony, its scope and possibilities (29). His own reception of postmodernism runs against the tide of skepticism and rejection. Aspects of postmodernism that Ahmed finds engaging with Islam are schizophrenia and fragmentation, nostalgia, history and fundamentalism, to name a few. His main focus in *Postmodernism and Islam*, however, is the manipulation of the global media and its 'representation' of Islam.

To close the circle even more, to move from Islam and postmodernism in general to Islam and postmodern literature specifically, is even more problematic. Criticism on literary postmodernism in works outside the western literary tradition, specifically in literature about Islam, is scarce. In his book *Salman Rushdie*, James Harrison accounts for reasons why postmodernism may not exist in eastern literary criticism. He claims that "though poetry has a long and distinguished history in Arabic, fiction, and certainly anything resembling twentieth-century fiction in English, is a very new arrival in the Muslim world...and those of postmodernist fiction even more so" (103). To

date, I know of Nasrin Rahimieh's work of Salman Rushdie's use of postmodern devices in his first novel, *Grimus*, as well as the criticism I list in chapter four concerning Rushdie's *The Satanic Verses*, but of no other works from the eastern literary tradition that engage postmodernism. So, I am most anxious to explore the postmodern attributes of Nawal el Saadawi's *The Fall of the Imam* and Salman Rushdie's *The Satanic Verses* because accompanying an emphasis on traditionalism that has surfaced in a number of Muslim countries is a rise in Islamic fundamentalism that I believe both postmodern novels speak to. My exploration of the relationship between postmodernism and Rushdie's *The Satanic Verses* and el Saadawi's *The Fall of the Imam* takes the following course:

Chapter Two, "Postmodern Zones and Postmodern Devices: Problematizing Ontology" first traces the crisis of representation in postmodern discourse via Ferdinand de Saussure's modern structural linguistics. Postmodernist writing, the argument goes, rejects the notion of a clear distinction between presence and absence in terms of representation. Saussure's groundwork provides theorist Brian McHale with the notion that postmodern fiction's anti-representation orientation is a challenge to ontology. In the next section, I trace McHale's argument that postmodern fiction foregrounds the issue of ontology because postmodern fiction destabilizes the notion of one reality through the creation of multiple zones. Multiple zones are the postmodern framework of *The Satanic Verses* and *The Fall of the Imam*. Prob-

lematizing the notion of one reality, I identify zones that range from that of the living and the dead, to the metafictional, to the mythic, and to dream states, all which cause ontological confusion. In the final section of the chapter I analyze four postmodern textual strategies fragmented subjectivities, multiple narratives, multiple endings, and non-linear time that corroborate with the zones to destabilize the notion of a fixed, coherent, identifiable reality.

Chapter Three, "Salman Rushdie's Postmodern Critique of Islam" follows the crisis of representation in another direction. Looking at the content of *The Satanic Verses*, I submit via François Lyotard that the notion of a clear distinction between the world and the sign, between the world and **one** Islamic Truth is no longer credible. Following Lyotard's argument in *The Postmodern Condition*, I submit that Salman Rushdie believes that the grand narrative of Islam does not admit heterogeneity or contradictions. He critiques the unified and absolute authority of fundamental Islam and the authority of its interpreters, contesting and undermining Muhammad's sacred nature, and taking issue with the uncreated nature of the Quran by asking questions, casting doubt. In all cases, Rushdie believes that fundamental Islam is coercive and intolerant of difference.

Chapter Four, "Nawal el Saadawi's Postmodern Feminist Critique of Islam" follows from Lyotard's critique of metanarratives for the case of Nawal el Saadawi's *The Fall of the Imam* but through a different sphere of

analysis. El Saadawi's position is a feminist position. She takes issue with fundamentalist Islam's subordination of women. I first discuss the compatibility of feminist and postmodernist theory relying on N. Fraser and L. Nicholson's cogent presentation of the debate. While Fraser and Nicholson are aware of the shortcomings of Lyotard's postmodernism, they are optimistic that it and feminism can be mutually strengthening. Then I move to Nawal el Saadawi's critique of Islam's representation of women as 'body'. I assert that *The Fall of the Imam* provides ample instances of the negative valuation of woman as body, then that el Saadawi, via Hélène Cixous's gender analysis of the binary opposition of man/woman, mind/body, chooses to destroy the representation of woman as body. Only then does el Saadawi move to reinsert an alternative image of Muslim women, to re-vision the image of women in the Islamic picture. In the final section of the chapter I explore el Saadawi's valuation of woman as voice and mind.

Chapter Five, "Conclusion," recounts the postmodern strategies in both Rushdie's and el Saadawi's works.

CHAPTER TWO

Postmodern Zones and Postmodern Devices: Problematizing Ontology

One of postmodernism's most prominent features is its anti-representational stance. Taking direction from theories of structural linguistics, theorists like Derrida, Foucault, Barthes, and Lyotard call into question modernism's notion that language provides privileged access to truth and knowledge of the world by accurate representation of an objective world. The various ways that modernism characterises representation are summarised by Pauline Rosenau in her work *Post-Modernism and the Social Sciences: Insights, Inroads, and Intrusions*. Definitions include representation as *delegation*, where one individual represents another in parliament; representation as *resemblance*, where a painting represents on canvas what the painter observes; representation as *replication*, where the photograph (image) represents the person photographed (object); representation as *repetition*, where a writer puts on paper the word (language) that represents his/her idea or thought (meaning); and representation as *duplication*, where a photocopy represents the original (92). All assume a one-to-one correspondence between

the language symbol and the objective world. Contemporary theorists of language, however, destabilise this relational notion when they refashion representation in terms of Saussure's structuralist linguistic theory. Briefly, Saussure's views are as follows. Saussure sees language as a system of signs where each sign is made up of a 'signifier' (the marks on a page in writing), and a 'signified' (the concept or meaning the marks refer to). He postulates that the relation between the signifier and the signified is arbitrary, that no direct relationship exists between the two. Further, he submits that each sign has meaning not in itself, but by virtue of its difference from other signs in the system. In his discussion of structural linguistics in his work *Literary Theory*, Terry Eagleton offers the example of the signifier 'c-a-t' which is able to signify 'cat' only to the extent that it differs from 'cap' or 'cad' or 'bat' (96-97). Saussure makes the subsequent distinction: as there is not direct relation between signifier and signified, there is not direct relation between the signs of a linguistic system and an objective reality outside that system. Or, to put it differently, Eagleton says that structuralists like Saussure emphasise the constructed nature of human meaning:

The structuralist emphasis on the 'constructedness' of human meaning represented a major advance....The confident bourgeois belief that the isolated individual subject was the fount and origin of all meaning took a sharp knock: language predated the individual, and was much less his or her product than he or she was the product of it....It was impossible any longer to see reality simply as something 'out there', a fixed order of

things that language merely reflected....Reality was not reflected by language but produced by it. (107-108)

In the same way that Saussure undercuts the notion of one reality and emphasises the notion of the constructedness of realities, literary theorists follow suit and talk of how certain postmodern literary tools call into question the status of reality. In *Five Faces of Modernity: Modernism, Avant-Garde, Decadence, Kitsch, Postmodernism*, literary theorist, M. Calinescu states how postmodern writing problematizes representation and how it effaces referents:

What does representation represent? How does one reconcile the countless logical contradictions that turn up when one attempts to answer this question seriously?... [One finds] a proliferation of images and actions directly or indirectly linked to the idea of representation: mirrors and copies, reflections and duplications, the unexpected and intricate paradoxes of resemblance, pretending, acting, impersonating, or mimicking, and the various mental predicaments they bring about, in the shape of vicious circles, beggings of the question, and infinite regresses. (300)

Rather than referents that establish the truth of an objective world, Calinescu sees multiple strategies that focus on the issue of ontology. He believes that postmodern devices like duplication and multiplication, parodic thematization, equal treatment of fact and fiction, self-referentiality and metafiction (303-304) question reality by emphasising "a new existential or ontological use of narrative perspectivism, different from the mainly psycho-

logical one found in modernism" or that which is called epistemological doubt (304).² Ontology is also the key aspect of Brian McHale's theory of postmodern structure. In his work *Postmodernist Fiction* McHale theorizes the emergence of the ontological orientation of postmodernist fiction by beginning his discussion, paradoxically, with the Russian formalist concept of *dominant*. To help differentiate postmodernism from modernism, to explain the *post* in postmodernism, as it were, and get to the issue of ontology, McHale quotes Roman Jakobson:

In the evolution of poetic form it is not so much a question of the disappearance of certain elements and the emergence of others as it is the question of shifts in the mutual relationship among the diverse components of the system, in other words, a question of the shifting dominant. Within a given complex of poetic norms in general, or especially within the set of poetic norms valid for a given poetic genre, elements which were originally secondary become essential or primary. On the other hand, the elements which were originally the dominant ones become subsidiary and optional. (108)

In the above scheme, the dominant is the focusing component of a work of art, that which guarantees some coherence to the literary work, and literary

² In "Narratives of Postmodernism," J. Mephan names the textual strategy that produces undecidability *abortive mimesis*. According to Mepham, some postmodern strategies make the text unstable, unreadable: "Problems arise from inconsistent or interrupted mimesis. Possible worlds are projected at different and incompatible ontological levels, so that when items appear within two different worlds they are 'unreadable'. Mimesis stops and starts and the reader is forced to reframe but can never arrive at a coherent and stable solution" (151).

evolution is a shift in poetic norms or systems. At certain periods in literary evolution, certain norms or systems are dominant, highlighted, or foregrounded, while others are secondary or peripheral. Accordingly, particular poetic structures and thematics arise. In the case of modernist fiction, McHale agrees with Calinescu that the dominant is epistemological. Both form and content concern themselves with knowledge, with *what* and *how* we know, deeming reality something to know, to interpret. Under these conditions, McHale states that such fiction is informed by questions like "how can I interpret this world of which I am a part? And what am I in it?" (9).

Contrary to modernist writing, postmodernist writings of recent decades foreground a different dominant, the ontological, which concerns itself with modes of being. Again, the basis for McHale's terminology is poetics. He explains that his ontology comes "from the use of the term in poetics, above all by Roman Ingarden...and by Thomas Pavel and others who have adapted terms from modal logic ('possible worlds') to the description of fictional worlds....For a working definition, let me cite Pavel: an ontology is 'a theoretical description of a universe' ("Change of Dominant" 75). Informed by questions like "Which world is this? What is to be done in it? Which of my selves is to do it?", reality, according to McHale, is perceived as contradictory, unknowable, a fiction (*Fiction* 10). Form and content resist reading, just as the world resists interpretation, and the truth of *the* objectifiable reality gives way to tentativeness. Douwe Fokkema supports McHale, saying that

"the postmodernist...has given up the attempt at explaining [reality]...he would rather develop a logic which admits inner contradictions...or grant an ontological status to objects that exist merely in the mind" (*Literary History* 45).

To return to the *post* in postmodern, then, one can say that postmodernism comes after modernism, but one need not conceptualise postmodernist writing as that which supplants modernist fiction's agenda. As McHale demonstrates with the concept of the dominant, postmodernist fiction merely moves the modernist agenda to the background. Contemporary postmodern writer, Ron Sukenick, agrees: "Contemporary fiction still has to deal with the issue [of epistemology]....But it doesn't have to *focus* on it necessarily...maybe this issue is already established now as something we can take for granted....We assume that now, and are free to investigate other things" (286). Those 'other things' are issues of ontology.

And where do these multiple realities exist? McHale postulates that constructing *worlds* as opposed to *a world* means that the multiplicity of worlds needs to occupy a kind of space that is able to accommodate pluralities. McHale offers M. Foucault's concept of the heterotopia to explain the zones where multiple narrative worlds can exist:

There is a worse kind of disorder than that of the incongruous, the linking together of things that are inappropriate; I mean the disorder in which fragments of a large number of possible orders glitter separately in the dimension, without law or geometry, of

the heteroclite;...in such a state, things are 'laid,' 'placed,' 'arranged' in sites so very different from one another that it is impossible to find a place of residence for them, to define a *common locus* beneath them all....Heterotopias are disturbing, probably because they secretly undermine language, because they make it impossible to name this and that, because they destroy 'syntax' in advance, and not only syntax with which we construct sentences but also that less apparent syntax which causes words and things (next to and also opposite to one another) to 'hold together.' (*Postmodernist Fiction* 44)

And lest we follow our impulse to order that space, McHale explains that heterotopic spaces, or *zones*, are spaces of existence rather than order. Speaking about cyberpunk's relationship to the heterotopia, McHale believes that the heterotopia is "the impossible space where fragments of disparate discursive orders are merely juxtaposed, without any attempt to reduce them to a common order" ("Elements" 154). Multiple realities exist and, ideally, no one reality has more status than another. This includes the reality of the world we live in which is, in postmodern terms, only one fictional reality amongst all fictional realities, and not *the* objective, truthful frame of reference for interpretation. In other words, the created worlds, including the ones we live in, are semiotic worlds, ever-shifting systems of signification, worlds of difference, worlds of complexity. This chapter focuses on the repertoire of strategies that foreground the ontological structure of text and worlds in *The Satanic Verses* and *The Fall of the Imam*. The formal strategies function to

create uncertainty, unpredictability, and resistance, and the texts emphasise indeterminacy, difference, and complexity. From this, *the* truth gives way to tentativeness or, as McHale believes, ontological perspectivism, a "flickering" effect between constructed worlds.

In the heterotopian spaces of *The Satanic Verses*, one moves through permeable borders of many zones, from dream to fantasy, from the world of the living to the world of the dead, and from today to the beginning of time, asking the ontological question "Where am I?" Rushdie, himself, believes that *The Satanic Verses* resists being a complete form. In an interview with Sean French, Rushdie says that it is written without scaffolding, that when he wrote it he wanted to write it in such a way that the book itself was metamorphosing all the time, and that, although he believed that in the process, his book *fell apart* (*Observer* 25/09/88 in *File 8*), in my view, it does not *fall apart*. Rather, it presents multiple ontological landscapes of complexity and difference which resist totalizing readings. Although *The Satanic Verses* presents a number of complex ontological zones, I limit my discussion to three: metafictional zones that, at times become literalized, zones of myth, and zones of geographical and psychic space.

Stepping into the heterotopic space of *The Satanic Verses*, we encounter a first zone, that of metafiction, the self-conscious position of constructing narrative. We begin mistrusting the ontological status of the zones because of the maze of realities presented by mirrors and labyrinths which beg

Calinescu's question of what representation represents. For instance, early on we are told that "When you have stepped through the looking-glass you step back at your peril. The mirror may cut you to shreds" (58), a warning cum Alice in Wonderland, perhaps, of the peril of taking for granted any referential status of what we read. Equally discomfiting is Saladin Chamcha's mirror which alters his face. Try as he may to remind himself that he is a 'real' man with a 'real' history, when he looks into his mirror, his thoughts keep returning to the notion that the world does not exist beyond that mirror (135-136). Mirrors destabilise the concept of one world. They shake the foundations of *a* represented world for represented representations of worlds, plural. Indeed, some postmodernists even argue that ultimately all representations refer to other representations, that nothing is authentic and that all is simulacrum, as is the visage of Changez Chamchawala that "is a feeble simulacrum of his former ogre-face" (67), or, in the words of Rosa Diamond, that "in an ancient land like England there was no room for new stories, every blade of turf had already been walked over a hundred thousand times" (144). From mirrors to labyrinths, we lose our composure, lose our way. As we read this novel, as we pace in labyrinthine patterns like Mahound/Muhammad³ (119), travel the labyrinth of yellowbrick lane of the oth-

³ Although Rushdie uses the name Mahound throughout his fictional text, I feel it necessary to qualify the historically negative 'Mahound' by appending the more respectful name of the Prophet, Muhammad, unless I am using a direct quotation. As I do not wish to offend anyone who may think I mean disrespect by the term 'Mahound', the names will appear as Mahound/Muhammad in this thesis.

erworld, Oz (282), or wander through the greatest labyrinth of all, the brothel in Jahilia, a maze of twists and turns that befuddles even those who live there, we can appreciate William Gleason's remarks in "The Postmodern Labyrinths of *Lot 49*" about the destabilizing nature of labyrinths. Gleason believes that the multicursal paths not only confuse and decenter, but even terrorise (83-85). Security of being in one place is denied and perceptions flicker amongst different, competing notions as we ask 'Where are we?', the question of ontology.

Just as mirrors and labyrinths construct and undermine realities, so do those other instances of constructedness in *The Satanic Verses*. Most obvious is the emphasis on the manufacturedness of the Gibreel(s) and Saladin(s) who, as actors, are never one but many and who are never static but forever 'works in progress'. Time and again the narration reminds us that as actors, Gibreel and Saladin wear masks and constantly make and remake themselves. Gibreel Farishta, born Ismail Najmuddin, renames himself Gibreel Farishta as a young adult, while Saladin Chamcha, born Salahuddin Chamchawala, becomes Saladin Chamcha. Gibreel is a master actor who plays many gods in the pantheon of gods, with his chairmen zooming him from role to role to be re-costumed and remade (11), changing elephant head for monkey tail. His images are ubiquitous, "suspended over its devotees in the artificial cinematic night...for Gibreel had spent the greater part of his unique career incarnating....It was part of the magic of his persona that he suc-

ceeded in crossing religious boundaries" (16). Similarly, Saladin is a man of 1000 voices. He constructs himself for voice-overs in television commercials (33), and his face comes to confuse even himself: "[Saladin] had constructed his face with care — it had taken him several years to get it just right — and for many more years now he had thought of it simply as *his own* — indeed, he had forgotten what he had looked like before it" (33). As manufactured characters, who work in simulated backgrounds and landscapes, processed through machines, obliged to spend 4 hours every day under prosthetic make-up (63), Gibreel and Saladin lose substance, lose *a* reality: "les acteurs ne sont pas des gens'....Masks beneath masks until suddenly the bare bloodless skull" (34).

These constructed characters often live in celluloid, constructed worlds, and sometimes "the movie character steps out of the screen" (13) and fiction becomes literalized until it is impossible to disentangle filmstrips from life. We know that Gibreel's one reality reads like a videotaped movie where he flickers from one reality to the next: "everytime I go to sleep the dream starts up from where it stopped. Same dream in the same place. As if somebody just paused the video while I went out of the room. Or, or. As if he's the guy who's awake and this is the bloody nightmare. His bloody dream: us" (83). We also know that Billy Battutu and S.S. Sisodia want to make a film of Gibreel's dreams, his schizoid episodes. The film is to be a movie about Jahilia and the Prophet Mahound/Muhammad (272), a mirror of the literary text we are

reading. Moreover, Gibreel, himself, wants a film series where he plays himself/selves across the zone boundaries, Gibreel the historical Archangel, and Gibreel of London, again like our text. His rationale, in metafictional terms, is that "once those stories were clearly placed in the artificial, fabricated world of the cinema, it ought to become easier for [him] to see them as fantasies, too" (347). Fiction becomes literal, the literal becomes fiction, sometimes in infinite regress, multiple worlds made possible by synthetic artifacts. In the preface to *The Anti-Aesthetic* Hal Foster asserts that postmodern texts are full of such artifacts and ensuing contradictions where one reality is not privileged, where the worlds "are not a *work* in modernist terms — unique, symbolic, visionary — but *texts* in postmodernist terms, already written, allegorical, contingent" (xi).

A second zone that exists in the hetertopic space is a mythic zone. Rather than ordering and structuring as they do in modernist works, myths assume a different role in postmodern writings. In his essay on Robert Kroetsch, Martin Kuester discusses a modernist view of myth as "simply a way of controlling, of ordering, of giving a shape and a significance to the immense panorama of futility and anarchy which is contemporary history" (141). In contrast, he points out that authors of postmodern literature reject control and order and opt for momentary insights that spring up here and there. Not God-given, man-made myths avoid singular meanings and closure (142). Inevitably, mythological zones are not to be trusted to center. They are unpre-

dictable and confusing, forever metamorphosing, and ultimately just one of many zones that characters inhabit, cross, leave behind.

The Satanic Verses opens with a mythical zone, that of rebirth. Saladin Chamcha and Gibreel Farishta tumble through "the air-space...the most insecure and transitory of zones, illusory, discontinuous, metamorphic" (5), towards the earth below, recalling not only the fall from the grace of God but subsequent rebirth with Gibreel's first words "To be born again" (3). It is a zone of rebirth replete with unpredictable "cloudforms [that] ceaselessly metamorphosized gods into bulls, women into spiders, men into wolves" (6). It is, however, a mutated rebirth, one that mystifies and confuses, one that is likened to the "head-to-tail, end-over-end, ceaseless metamorphosing of Alice's Wonderland", the land or zone where logic is turned inside out (6). And lest we get comfortable in this first rebirth that echoes Christian mythology, Rushdie offers a multiplicity of rebirths. It is juxtaposed to a scientific rebirth, "Out of thin air: a big bang, followed by falling stars. A universal beginning" (4); a folktale rebirth, "Knocked a little silly by the blast, Gibreel and Saladin plummeted like bundles dropped by some carelessly open-beaked stork" (4), a live human birth, "Chamcha going down head first, in the recommended position for babies entering the birth canal" and a birth of reincarnation (5). Such competing myths inspire doubt and raise questions of ontology, of which world of myth is to be trusted.

Helping to make postmodern mythical zones problematic are fantastic characters who, according to McHale, blur the boundaries of acceptance. He discusses the relationship between the fantastic and ontology as such:

the fantastic involves a face-to-face confrontation between the possible (the 'real') and the impossible, the normal and the paranormal. Another world penetrates or encroaches upon our world as in "House Taken Over", or some representative of our world penetrates an outpost of the other world, the world next door (as in "Aura"). Either way, this precipitates a confrontation between real-world norms (the laws of nature) and other-worldly, supernatural norms [where]...the fantastic can still be seen as a zone of hesitation, a frontier...between this world and the world next door. (*Postmodernist Fiction* 75)

It is little surprise, then, that characters can change their ontological status by undergoing one of two processes in transworld migration, or the process whereby entities move back and forth across the semipermeable membranes between zones. For instance, "mythification" is the process whereby entities move from the realm of the profane to the realm of the sacred, while "fictionalization" is the process whereby entities lose their status of superiority as myths to exist in the world as fiction (36). Both processes, according to McHale, force a broadening of perspectives, even a confusion of sorts, and both processes operate in *The Satanic Verses*. The most obvious example is, of course, Gibreel Farishta who becomes the Angel Gabriel, complete with angelic powers. In this process of mythification, Gibreel/Gabriel is

able to perform miraculous feats not only in Jahilia, where he regularly floats above Mahound/Muhammad and delivers messages from God, but in London where, in one instance, he escapes a fire with a miracle of "parting the fire and smoke like the parting of the red sea" (*The Satanic Verses* 468).

Similarly, the Imam of fiction becomes the mythological character of a devil committed to stamping out doubt and polytheism. In a struggle of mythological proportions, he crosses ontological zones from present London to ancient Jahilia, and this fictional man, the Imam, turns into a monstrous devil who struggles and kills the mythological goddess Al-Lat:

rising...is a mythological apparition with vast black wings, her hair streaming loose, as long and black as the Imam's is long and white: Al-Lat....'Kill her,' the Imam commands....Down she tumbles, Al-Lat queen of the night; crashes upside down to earth....And Gibreel, looking away from her in horror, sees the Imam grown monstrous, lying in the palace forecourt with his mouth yawning open at the gates; as the people march through the gates he swallows them whole. (215)

The profane has become 'sacred', as it were.

In turn, the devil of mythology is fictionalised, brought down to the fictional world of *The Satanic Verses* in the form of the transmogrified Saladin Chamcha. Sadadin acquires devil horns, hooves, tail, hair, bleats, a goat's appetite, and eyes as red as the devil's (271-273). After continuous growth and transformation, with a fury he cannot control, "with pestilential blasting breath, and with arms raised high and goat-legs dancing he looked, at last,

like the very devil whose image he had become" (273). This devil, however, has little mythological power, save that of transformation and his own wits because this devil has been fictionalised. Or, as McHale states, the 'sacred' has become profane.

Co-existing with metafictional and mythic zones in the heterotopic space is a third and final zone of *The Satanic Verses* I wish to discuss — a geographical zone of physical space and of psychic space. With the first, physical space, rather than definable, centered physical geography, one encounters a geography of impermanence and impreciseness. There is always doubt as to where we are. Saladin and Gibreel bump to *an* earth, a zone where "the sky was blood-orange flecked with green, and the snow was blue as ink" (132). Saladin's attempts to blink himself back to some former sense of "stable reality" are useless, so he comes to understand that he has fallen into some "wrongness, some other place, not England or perhaps *not-England*, some counterfeiting zone, rotten borough, altered state...transit lounge" (132). And within the twilight zone (190) of not-England is another "fabled country" (35), Proper London, that "chameleon of cities" (201) whose identity is not fixed but flickers around its plethora of names: Vilayet, Alphaville, Babylon, Mahoganny, Ellowen deeowen, Bigben Nelsontown Lordstavern Bloody tower Queen, Hell, Jahannum, Gehenna, and Muspellheim. This city-scape that goes by so many names is mercurial, inconstant, even fickle. As Gibreel discovers, it "changes shape at will and without warning, thus making it im-

possible for him to approach his quest in a systematic manner" (327). When asked by interviewer Sean French about the shape-shifting nature of London, Rushdie admits his intentions: "I suppose I was writing about a sense of the city as an artificial, invented space which is constantly metamorphosing. It doesn't have roots" (*Observer* 25/09/88 in *File 9*).

Ellowen deeowen is not the only cityscape capable of defying identification or comprehension. Equally resistant to form is Jahilia (Mecca), that city of polytheism turned faithful. It, too, is unstable, impermanent, "built entirely out of sand...the stuff of inconstancy, — the quintessence of unsettlement, shifting, treachery, lack-of-form" (94). With permeable boundaries, Jahilia allows/encourages Gibreel to move in and out, or equally precise, Jahilia to move in and out of Gibreel. Of Jahilia, too, Gibreel must ask the question "How did one map a country that blew into a new form every day?" (370).

While the physical geography resists form, so, too, does the psychic geography of *The Satanic Verses*, where zones of dreams and fantasies defy a reality. Visions of the corporeal body/personage of a dead climber, Maurice Wilson, appear in Allelluia Cone's waking reality (199, 334, 442), while Saladin experiences permeable boundaries between a waking state and a nightmare (141). For Gibreel, the severity of zone crossings varies. At times, one zone merely seeps into another, as when he decides that "what was going on behind his eyelids, the universe of his nightmares, had begun to leak into

his waking life" (144). At other times, though, after the "seals had broken between the zones" (304), he finds he is completely in another zone (or another zone is completely within him): "the boundaries of the earth broke, he heard a noise like the bursting of a dam, and as the spirits of the world of dreams flooded through the breach into the universe of the quotidian, Gibreel Farishta saw God" (318). Ultimately, so confused by the psychic zones he "no longer recognizes the distinction between the waking and dreaming states; — he understands now something of what omnipresence must be like, because he is moving through several stories at once" (457). And, lest these examples mistakenly present a straightforward, linear, in/out process, consider the following convolution of dreams within dreams, within waking states:

[Ayesha], dreaming Gibreel in coat and hat looked at him...nodded and stretched out beside him, nude. Then in the dream he fell asleep, out cold...and when [he] dreamed himself awake again she was standing in front of him with that loose white hair and the butterflies clothing her: transformed....So now I have a dream-wife, the dreamer becomes conscious to think. (226)

The layering of dream and other reality zones becomes so vertiginous that the sequences of realities are almost impossible to disentangle. Within the multiple violations of boundaries which "seem as tangible as the shifting realities we must ask where we are.

Such, then, are the zones that occupy the heterotopic space of *The Satanic Verses*: metafictional, mythic, and geographical. A look at el Saadawi's *The Fall of the Imam* demonstrates that this narrative, too, forces the ontological to occupy the foreground. And three zones somewhat analogous to those of *The Satanic Verses* occupy the heterotopia. Mythic zones, geographical zones of both physical and psychic space, and zones of the living and the dead are the worlds that resist unification, where characters move through permeable boundaries and boundaries move through them.

Similar to *The Satanic Verses*, a mythic zone of birth/rebirth inhabits *The Fall of the Imam*. In the chapter "They Cannot Read," the form of a woman emerges from darkness into humanity, reminiscent of Eve:

[Out of the] impenetrable darkness, an opaque black without sun or moon...in a forest thick with overgrown trees...came a faint light...[and] the shadow of a body fleeing...on two legs...a woman....She was young, very young, her bones small, her skin smooth like a child, brown as river silt, her face pointed with slanting wide-open eyes, their pupils blacker than the blackest night. A goddess of ancient times. She ran barefoot....Her right hand carried something like the branch of a tree. Her body was naked, shining, a silver fish splitting the universe, her 'pubic shame' hidden under the wing of night, or a dark green leaf.

(*The Fall of the Imam* 3)

The passage recalls the birth of Eve in Eden, a "forest thick with overgrown trees" as Eve moves from innocence — "young, skin like a child, naked body"

— to her fall from grace, to her shame and the covering of her shame with the “darkness of night, or a dark green leaf.” Competing with this Christian mythology in the same passage is a pre-Christian sentiment. We have “a goddess of ancient times,” an elemental goddess who is “light as the wind” (3), a goddess who originates before the Roman Eve. This goddess could be from Mesopotamia, with her “skin brown as river silt, her face pointed with slanting wide-open eyes, their pupils blacker than the blackest night.” Just as history reminds us that the polytheism of goddesses was displaced by the monotheism of a patriarchal God, the next page tells us how the multiple was silenced into the singular, how “the heavens echoed with a thousand voices uniting as one voice” (4).

As in *The Satanic Verses*, the processes of mythification take place in *The Fall of the Imam*. The Imam becomes a character of mythical proportion. By crossing the boundaries from the profane to the sacred, he changes his ontological status. He acquires the god-like powers of omnipotence, space/time travel, and total knowledge. The people pray and “look to heaven and see the Imam (God)” (6) and, of course, Bint Allah believes she is the daughter of God and since she is the daughter of the Imam, the Imam must be God (13). The Imam, himself, believes he is as all-powerful as God:

I closed my eyes and opened them again only to find myself in the highest kingdom of heaven where stands the tree of thorns overlooking the infinite infinity of the universe. There I heard God call me, saying judge of judges, remove the mist which lies

over your eyes so that your sight may be renewed, your face renewed, and your spirit renewed. My memory at once became as clear as crystal so that I realized immediately that I was the very soul of the Imam, that I was none other than the Imam in his previous phases and that God had delivered to me all secrets of the universe, of the sciences and of medicine, so that I could recognize a sickness and prescribe its cure, tell who speaks the truth from he who lies, know the voice of God from the voice of Satan. (140)

Mythification also occurs with the character(s) of Bint Allah/Nemat Allah/Gawaher (the subjectivity of the three females is both singular and plural at the same time, a point I discuss below) as they cross the boundaries from the realm of the profane to the realm of the sacred. The multiple female persona experiences immaculate conceptions cum the Virgin Mary, hence it/they acquire(s) mythological status. From the opening page we are told that Bint Allah's mother died a virgin, impossible since Bint Allah claims to be her daughter, impossible unless you are the Virgin Mary. Here is Nemat Allah's memory of her and Gawaher's immaculate conception: "She tells me how God visited her mother in a dream and how after that she became pregnant with child like the Virgin Mary. When her belly grew big she put on a wide flowing robe in order to hide what had happened" (15). Bint Allah's experience accords with her sister's: "In the children's home I prayed regularly and God appeared to me in my dreams as a man. He caressed my bosom with a gentle hand and my belly became swollen with the Jesus Christ that was yet to be

born....My belly rose with a sacred pregnancy and I watched it grow slowly like a ball filling up gradually with air" (49). Again, the layering of myth and fiction destabilises ontology in this first zone.

A second zone that inhabits the heterotopic space is a geographical zone, with both physical and psychic geographies. Like *The Satanic Verses*, the geographic space resists definition, boundaries are effaced and we are in doubt as to where we are. In fact, we are as much everywhere as nowhere because the descriptions of 'place' are vague. Consider the following: "The world was as it is today. Things were the same. The sky, the earth, the trees, the houses, the river, and the sea. I asked: Is this the Mediterranean Sea? And is this the River Nile? They said: Here names can be different and time passes but the place is the same and the sun is the same, and the ears of corn are the same" (5). The narrative is rarely more precise than this passage. The cityscape is equally empty of detail. There is mention of a military camp, a House of Joy, the prostitute's residence, a palace, and a nurse's school, but we know nothing of their visage. Even the orphan's home is nondescript, fading into nothingness, like the other 'places'. Experiences and narratives are not structured or anchored by geographical space. We neither have a center nor boundaries for situatedness or permanence.

More often than not, ontology shifts so that physical 'place' gives over to psychic space, the space of dream zones. But even dream states are confusing because of narrational shifts in tenses which inspire doubt and disorienta-

tion. For instance, in an early chapter, "The Children of God," the narrator narrates events of the past using the past tense: "In my sleep I often *used to dream* of my mother" (13), then changes to present tense: "The night is dark and everyone has gone to bed, but there she is standing alone in the same place where I always find her....I get out of bed and walk on my bare feet towards the voice" (13). Is the event now, or then? Dream and reality collapse in on each other in a confusion of tenses. Because boundaries are fluid the narrative moves, not so much in and out of zones, but through zones simultaneously, as if it really does not matter if it were then or now. Or, more importantly, it is both then and now.

The psychic space of dream zones function in a slightly different manner for Bint Allah. She can create dream zones at will when she needs the boundaries of one reality to give way for her survival. She literally produces or manufactures a dream or sleeping state to cope with the reality of punishment and abuse and can be asleep/awake/dreaming/unconscious separately, or confusingly, all at the same time. For example, she slips away from the pain of another when the satanic keeper of the orphanage, Baba, drags a small girl to the punishment cell. Bint Allah closes her eyes and sleeps and dreams, for a few moments, until the incident passes (19). Similarly, when she, herself, receives Baba's punishment, she moves from one zone of consciousness to another state of sleep/dream:

My turn had come to be punished...I felt his thick fingers close tightly over my arm. I closed my eyes and abandoned myself. He was God, and he could take me wherever he wished. I woke from my sleep to find myself lying in bed. There was a feeling of wetness under my body, and over my thigh was something warm and sticky like sweat. (22)

A final ontological zone in *The Fall of the Imam* that occupies the heterotopic space is a zone of the living and the dead. For McHale, death is the ultimate postmodern zone because it can efface not only boundaries but zones (*Postmodernist Fiction* 65). Death marks the limits of representation (228). Of interest here is his example of the classical character, Shahrazad, whose very existence depends on telling stories, and to whom death not only ends the realm of discourse she created, but Shahrazad's own life. In *The Fall of the Imam*, boundaries between the worlds of the living and worlds of the dead are so permeable that the zones blend and allow beings to inhabit both or many worlds simultaneously. From the beginning we have confusion because the dead occupy the world of the living, and the living occupy the world of the dead. Ontology is questioned with statements like "the dead march out of the prisons (*Fall* 2). Often times, both worlds are occupied simultaneously, as when Gawaher, Bint Allah's mother, is stoned to death but turns to a personified rock statue that "continues to wait for [Bint Allah] in the dark of the night, standing where she always stood steadfast as a rock, with her hands clasped over her bosom and her face lifted up to the sky" (81). Is she in the zone of the dead? the living? or both?

Similarly, a recurring cycle is that characters die, reappear, die, and reappear again, over and over. Bint Allah's death occurs in the opening of the narrative and not less than ten times thereafter. Each time she dies, she reappears in a subsequent chapter. At one point she, too, is even both dead and living:

Three days her heart continued to beat after she died, they said, and for seven days her spirit wandered around the spot where she lay....They swore by God Almighty that they had seen her with their very own eyes walking on her own two legs, moving at her usual quick pace with her head held upright and her dog Marzouk behind her. (80)

And like Bint Allah, the Imam moves in and out of the life and death zones. He is killed in the beginning of the narrative and, like Bint Allah, reappears in each subsequent chapter. And like Bint Allah, he, too, is both dead and alive at one point:

He bent his head downwards from the sky to the earth, shifting his look away from the heavens, for he felt that God would support him for all time and that the Devil was also on his side....His eyes were occupied moving from one face to the other, searching all the time, and each one of those standing in the crowd was trying to push his neighbour with his elbows to occupy a place in front closer to the Imam, but his face was turned away from their struggling lines and his look kept sweeping the back rows of the crowd....He closed his eyes to sleep but realized he had been asleep all the time with a sleep deeper than that of

a tortoise, and nothing could awaken him anymore, neither the sound of shots being fired nor the explosions of rockets in the sky. (126)

Death, then, creates a problematic zone. Beginning with its title of death — *The Fall of the Imam*, the Imam's death — and ending with Bint Allah under total erasure, the silence of her life, the denial of her voice in the newspapers and the closure of her file which is buried deep in the earth forever (175), death, the ultimate ontological boundary, claims both lives and a foregrounded position.

To summarise for a moment, a multiplicity of zones riddle Foucault's heterotopic space in *The Satanic Verses* and *The Fall of the Imam*: zones of the dead and zones of the living, geographic zones of place and of dreams, mythic zones and, finally in the case of *The Satanic Verses*, with metafictional, constructed zones, all which make the ontological dominant. The following section looks at four textual devices that work hand in hand with the concept of a heterotopic space and of zones that help the pluralities of realities to reign and to undermine one reading to keep the ontological foregrounded. The four postmodern devices similar to both novels are fragmented narrative(s) flow, obsolete linear time, multiple or non-endings, and, finally, fragmented subjects. All foreground the heterogeneity of the heterotopic space and destabilise ontology, the notion of *one* reality.

The Satanic Verses is more than one narrative but while critics acknowledge the multiplicity, they seldom pursue the postmodern style and implica-

tion of the multiplicity. For instance, critic Sara Suleri believes that the multiple convoluted stories "stand the narrative on its head" but says little else about the style of those stories ("Contraband" 606). Undeniably, *The Satanic Verses* supports three dovetailing narratives: one of two twentieth century immigrants and their haphazard lives; one of the Prophet Mahound/Muhammad and the poet, Baal, at the dawn of Islam; and one of a teenage prophetess, Ayesha, and her march to the Arabian Sea. While each may be a complete narrative within itself, all are jumbled together into a fragmented whole where the reader's task is to knit and sew, as the need arises.

As the narratives are written, bits of one story give way to bits of the next story, and so on. The book is divided into nine sections. In the first section, "The Angel Gibreel," the first chapter introduces both Gibreel and Saladin, then the remaining four chapters alternate stories of each character. This story closes abruptly *in medias res* and violates our expectations about what is to come by beginning a completely different story in the section "Mahound" which, of course, is about the Prophet — his revelations, his doubts, and his self-exile from Jahilia. The form also violates our expectations as it does not consist of chapters. After the section "Mahound" also ends *in medias res*, the narrative of Gibreel and Saladin is picked up once again in the section "Ellowen Deeowen", where Rushdie uses the same alternating pattern for his chapters, and the same non-closure.

The following section, "Ayesha" now interrupts/inserts itself. It is a completely new story about a prophetess in contemporary India who gathers together the people of one village to embark on a holy journey to the Arabian Sea. Like "Mahound," "Ayesha" has no chapters and ends in midstream. From here it is difficult to predict which fragment will follow. In fact, the narrative does not return to "Mahound" and Jahilia, but back once again to Gibreel and Saladin in "A City Visible But Unseen," complete with two chapters about the two heroes. Only in the following section, "Return to Jahilia" does the narrative of "Mahound" begin again, for the last time. Now the narrative continues with a brief stopover in not-England in the section "The Angel Azrael" where, in three quick chapters, it provides a brief update on Gibreel and Saladin, before it moves to the penultimate section, "The Parting of the Arabian Sea" with Ayesha and her band of marchers, drowning in the Arabian Sea. Finally, the last section, section nine, "The Wonderful Lamp" has one chapter for both Gibreel and Saladin to end the Gibreel and Saladin narrative. Gibreel commits suicide and Saladin intends to continue in Bombay. Eschewing linearity for disruptions and fragments which jump across time, generations, and cultures, it is not clear what will come next in these narratives. Even upon completion it is difficult to define the whole as a coherence. The taste of fractions remains.

The Fall of the Imam, too, resists unity. It appears to be a narrative about coming of age, a Bildungsroman. Raymond Wilson's study of the

Bildungsroman defines it as a linear narrative progression that follows the linear growth, both physical and spiritual, of someone to maturity (54). Bint Allah's maturation, as we shall see, defies this expected pattern. The narrative begins at the end, with Bint Allah's adolescent death. The Bildungsroman proper, which begins in chapter three (bearing in mind that the chapters are unnumbered), develops for three chapters but then jettisons so that the lives of four other characters exist for four chapters. Two subsequent chapters pick up the thread of an adolescent Bint Allah, but they, too are interrupted, this time by the Imam. Finally, four chapters focus on a young adult Bint Allah, but then her life slides away both in the remaining nineteen chapters and in the narratives of other characters, and, contrary to the intention of the Bildungsroman, there is no neat closure resulting from "a spiritual crisis and a maturity and recognition of her/his identity and role in the world" (Abrams 120). The narrative is a labyrinth of logic, with its end at the beginning and its fragments of interruptions.

The novel's chapters are almost interchangeable; one could rearrange them in almost any order and still fulfil the requirements of this postmodern agenda. Although a few clusters of chapters function in succession, more often than not the end of one chapter does not signal a connection to the next. While re-ordering would not disrupt the narrative logic that does exist — that of power relations between the sexes, the oppression of women, the oppression of Islam, the confusion of Islamic law as interpreted, and the hope

for new discourses — one feels that shuffling the sections like a deck of cards would give infinite possible orders.

One final note on both these fragmented, circuitous narratives is the postmodern writer's penchant for interrupting one type of narrative genre for another type. Both *The Satanic Verses* and *The Fall of the Imam* change to a staged, scripted form of drama. For example, in the 'scene' of the raid on Club Hot Wax in *The Satanic Verses*, the set-up is that of a scripted scene. The setting is described — camera positions, actor positions, background props — and an unnamed narrator describes the action, moving from one dramatic moment to the next with a series of "Cut" filling in the spaces (454-456). Similarly, el Saadawi's short two page chapter "Eternal Love" scripts a love scene, complete with alternating narrations of "He said" "She said", and an ending of an embrace, for nameless male and female actors (82-83). A sardonic narrator in *The Satanic Verses* points out the postmodernist penchant for staged, superficial, even depthless worlds: "the postmodernist critiques of the West...[is] that we have here a society capable only of pastiche: a 'flattened' world" (261). In postmodern fashion, neither novel adheres to one narrative genre. Rather, both slip into the flattened world of the written script.

Just as the narratives are non-linear, so, too, is time, the second textual element to be tossed into a tailspin by postmodern tendencies. Rosenau believes that postmodern writers eschew linear time to add interest, arouse the

imagination [and] to challenge the creative intellect (70). This may be so but non-linear time also allows the question of ontology to occupy the dominant position: breaking the boundaries of time brings great uncertainty to reality.

In *The Satanic Verses* time is somewhat linear within the individual narratives, but becomes obsolete between narratives. The narratives are actually in "a denial of time" (41), in fact, supporting the birth/rebirth motif where time, itself, is reborn (4). The narratives are clocked with fairytale time:

"Once upon a time" we are told, over and over, but which time, whose time, where? Gibreel, the time-traveller, crosses time zones with ease, denying the existence of time as linear. In one sequence, "A City Visible but Unseen," he makes his debut back into the public arena of contemporary not-England (351), while a few pages later he appears to the Prophet giving laws (364).

What bridges the two landscapes is hardly a sequence of progressing time. As the narrator says, "he found himself escaping into sleep, diving headlong into it, away from Proper London and towards Jahilia, because the real terror had crossed the broken boundary wall" (356). Because we are uncertain as to the ontological status of reality, uncertain if dreams are dreams or reality is reality, we cannot rely on the rational functioning of time both in dreams and out of dreams. Without a doubt, our anchors of comfort are destroyed as time is reshaped and retranslated over and over. Its fate is to be "smashed" by the Imam and made into *Untime* (214), "inverted" by God (41), "re-invented" in Jahilia (123), even persuaded by Hind to "run backwards" (393). Its malle-

able postmodern nature translates into the ontological question, where are we?

Postmodern multiple narratives usually give way to multiple open endings. McHale points out that unlike the closed endings of Victorian novels that up loose ends in, say, death and marriage, and unlike the singular open ending of many modernist novels, postmodern endings are multiple where each ending is mutually-exclusive and each destabilizes the ontology of the projected world(s) (*Postmodernist Fiction* 109-110). Because it is a novel of three narratives and three disruptive frames, *The Satanic Verses* can claim at least three endings. While it is true that three narratives offer three endings, it is also true that of three, one violates the postmodern expectation. For the two narratives, Ayesha and Jahilia, although they may end in the death of the principle characters, the sense is that the ontological worlds remain. Without Ayesha, life goes on, and without Baal and Salman Farsi, life goes on in Jahilia. But the final narrative, Gibreel and Saladin's world, defies the postmodern openness with certain closures. "The Wonderful Lamp," the final episode of the Gibreel and Saladin narrative, closes on itself ending where it began, with the duo, Saladin and Gibreel. Coming full circle, the heroes face each other alone, just as they faced each other falling to the earth. And while the problematic postmodern style did away with expectations, throughout the text we see them reinstated with a final dramatic 'showdown'. Second, Gibreel ends his life and his misery of 'dreams', 'zone travels', or 'schizophrenic

episodes', whatever the case, with the neat narrative trick of suicide. What to do with a destabilised ontology? with dreams? with visions? with time-travelling? In a move that contradicts a postmodernism that shifts the question of realities to the foreground, Rushdie chooses to end the pluralities (plu(re)alities?) for one reality. Add to the above Saladin's rebirth as Salahuddin Chamchawala and the many closures in his life closures, closures like the marriage of his friends Hanif and Mishal (515), like the ending his 'constructed' life as a Vilayetite and the growing attachment to Bombay (406), like the reconstituted love for his father (529), like the acknowledgment of his loveless marriage, and like the admission of love for Zeenat Vakil (534). Although it is possible to view all the above as rebirths, all that is eclipsed by the overwhelming tie-ups that signal closure. Whatever the reasons, the ultimate Gibreel and Saladin story defies open-endedness. The end, ends.

The Fall of the Imam demonstrates a similar reliance on fractured time and multiple endings that stretch to breaking our belief in one reality. Of time, tenses change, dreams promote timelessness, and events repeat over and over to give a sense that time is almost mythical. The cyclical events of this text prompt the story to fold back and around itself, and to embrace a time that does not structure, but only hints. Eschewing linear time means that the narrative(s) lack a climax, a denouement, and a fixed ending. But, of course, this is the intent of a postmodernist thrust. As Fokkema says, "The

Postmodernist may end his story at any arbitrary moment...destroying the idea of connectivity" (*Literary History* 44). Clearly, for the characters of *The Fall of the Imam*, time is skewed or is an illusion, as the following proverb attests: "He who keeps his distance from the crown is always king (*Time (days) fly by before you can feel them, time is an illusion*)" (43). If time is problematic, so, too, is one ending. Without a structure of a beginning, a middle, and an end, we have multiple beginnings, and infinite endings in this circular narrative. As chapters lose their sequential order, they gain a never-ending supply of endings, depending on the ordering. Perhaps like Shahrazad "who feared even a moment's silence lest when she paused at some point in her tale her heart would stop beating" this postmodernist novel fears its heart will stop beating, become silenced with a fixed ending (59).

The fourth and final postmodern textual strategy that destabilizes the notion of one reality is the fragmented subject. In his essay "Postmodern Characterisation: The Ethics of Alterity" Thomas Docherty explains modernism's belief in an ideology that stresses the importance of individualism and the construction of an essential human nature. Its parallel support in literature is the stress of relying upon an individual who becomes a site of the dramatisation of that enlightenment. As such, the novel organizes characters into coherent, integrated and unified beings (171-173). Postmodern subjectivities, in contrast, deny coherence and structure. As R. Federman relates, postmodern writers eschew homogeneity for heterogeneity, wholeness for

fragmentation, and unification for contradiction. Federman even goes so far as to believe that postmodern characters are more honest than their predecessors:

the people of fiction, the fictitious beings, will also no longer be well-made characters who carry with them a fixed identity, a stable set of social and psychological attributes — a name, a situation, a profession, a condition, etc. The creatures of the new fiction will be changeable, as illusory, as nameless, as unnameable, as fraudulent, as unpredictable as the discourse that makes them. This does not mean, however, that they will be mere puppets. On the contrary their being will be more genuine, more complex, more true-to-life in fact, because they will not appear to be simply what they are; they will be what they are: word-beings.... That creature will be, in a sense, present to his own making, present to his own absence. (12-13)

How, then, are characters fragmented? In *The Satanic Verses* Rushdie is fond of denying characters their sole identity. In his interview with Sean French, he insists that subjectivities are multiple: "the sense of a homogenous, self-contained character is something I can't accept anymore. The way I look at a person now is composed of all sorts of irreconcilable elements, and I'm getting more and more interested in writing about them" (*Observer* 25/09/88 in *File* 9). He creates confusion and doubt by doubling up on names, of giving characters the same name while assigning them to different narratives and/or different historical times. James Harrison explains that Rushdie's penchant for repetition of names, for doubling up, as a non-rational,

destabilising effect: "recurring things in the plot, incidents or objects or phrases which in themselves have no meaning or no particular meaning...form a kind of non-rational network of connections" (196-197). For instance, there are two Hinds, one belonging to the female ruler of the city of Jahilia (ancient time/locale, Middle East) and the other a Pakistani immigrant restaurant owner (present time/locale, London), and two Mishals, one belonging to the restaurant owner's daughter and one to the wife of Indian landowner, Mirza Aseed (both present time, different locales). 'Ayesha' fractures yet one more time. There are no less than four Ayeshas. One is a butterfly seer (present time/present locale), one is Mahound/Muhammad's youngest wife (ancient time/ancient locale), one is a prostitute in Jahilia's brothel (ancient time/ancient locale), and one doubles as Ayesha/Al Lat (mythical time/ancient locale). According to Harrison, because the Ayeshas exist in Gibreel's dreams, the consequent dubiety of their status is sufficient to give us pause (107). Indeed, such duplication and/or multiplication undermines the stability of character, time, and place, and indeed we do pause.

The pieces of personality that do come together to constitute two of the main characters, Saladin Chamcha and Gibreel Farishta, can perhaps be considered pluralistic in some sense because both are migrants who must undergo metamorphosis, get translated, and both are made up of bits and fragments from here and there. Saladin is very mercurial. He is one who changes his name three times in the narrative; who undergoes a metamorphosis into a goat; who is a "translated Indian," neither belonging to India

nor England (58); who defines himself by a myriad of voices (1001 to be exact) (60); who breaks down when his "other self speaks to him" (416); who finally comes to see himself as a fragment, "as a pair of hands" (438). Can this Salahuddin/Saladin/Shaiten, whomever/whatever ever be whole? Not likely, because as he himself admits, his life is made up of shards of selves, "many old, rejected selves, many alternative Saladins — or rather Salahuddins — which split off from himself as he made his various life choices, but which had apparently continued to exist, perhaps in the parallel universes of quantum theory" (523). Universes? This fragmented self thrusts the notion of ontology front and center and the selves of Salahuddin/Saladin/Shaiten flicker amongst those universes.

Gibreel is not only fragmented but fractured. He is our transworld traveler gone "mad," "bugs," "insane," "looney," "baboon," "cracked," "paranoid," "schizoid." In accordance with postmodern strategies of breaking up a unified subjectivity, multiple Gibreels exist. Gibreel of not-London, Gibreel of Jahilia, Gibreel the angel guiding Ayesha's pilgrims to the Sea. He cannot hold 'himself/selves' together but constantly disintegrates and give way. Most believe he is insane. Ultimately even bits of selves dissolve into semiotic signs. For almost one hundred pages through the penultimate and ultimate sections, Gibreel of any presence fades from the narratives, becoming only words on the page, words without substance: "Gibreel dreamed a drought" (479), "Gibreel dreamed a suburb" (488), and, finally, "Gibreel dreamed a flood" (492). When he does emerges once more, to close the section "A Wonderful

Lamp," he offers a story as disjointed as his personality(ies), a pastiche story created with forgotten punctuation, popular ditties, and jumbled shards:

So he brought her along he meant no harm I know that now
 he just wanted us to be together caca can't you see he said
 she isn't ohoh over you not by a longshot and you he said
 still crazy fofor her everyone knows all he wanted was for us
 to be to be to be
 But I heard verses
 You get me Spoono
 V e r s e s
 Rosy apple lemon tart Sis boom bah
 I like coffee I like tea
 Violets are blue roses are red remember me when I am
 dead dead dead (544)

In accord with the notion of the postmodern subject in pieces, Saladin (one can even include Gibreel, as well) tries to make sense of the fracturing subjectivity and his answer echoes Rushdie's earlier words that the old is dead, mutated beyond a singular history: "He [Saladin] chose Lucretius over Ovid. The inconstant soul, the mutability of everything, das Ich, every last speck. A being going through life can become so other to himself as to *be another*, discrete, severed from history" (288).

Like *The Satanic Verses*, *The Fall of the Imam*, too, has its own fragmented subjectivities. The figures of Bint Allah/Nemat Allah/Gawaher become one and three, exchanging selves, becoming one another throughout the text. I discuss the multiple/pluralist subjectivity in the final section of the

thesis when I talk of the intersection of postmodernist theory and feminist theory in the text. Here, though, I want to examine how the Imam is and is not the Imam, how he is both one and many. When the Imam looks into his mirror, he sees 1000 faces (61) but even more disconcerting, he "had the ability to be in two places at the same time but no one except the Body Guard knew his secret" (42). His ability to pop up everywhere, like prism light fracturing in a number of directions, means that each fracture can be someone else. In essence the Imam is subjectivities, not subjectivity. He and the Body Guard wear masks or rubber faces so that none can tell them apart, neither the wife of the Imam who watches him in the mirror as he became two men, one the Imam and the other an exact double or copy, and one the Body Guard (110), nor the Imam and Body Guard themselves. Throughout, characters and readers alike are uncertain who is who. Consider the following passage of the death of the Imam/Body Guard:

But in this split second of time the gun went off. The Body Guard leapt to receive the bullet in his body with open arms. He fell to the ground at the Imam's feet without drawing attention to any one of the people around. His body seemed to evaporate, to melt in no time, only to be replaced by another body with exactly the same contours and lines and with exactly the same rubber face which he was wont to wear over his own face so that he remained the living image of the Imam and made it possible for anyone to distinguish between the true and false Imam even if it were his own wife. (41)

The con is so complete, the selves so mixed, that "No one in the whole land could possibly distinguish between the duo, tell the true Imam from the false Imam" (39). Who is dead, who is alive? Who represents whom? Who is in the world of the living, who inhabits the world of the dead? What we know for certain is that we have no anchor of centeredness, no 'real' world to have faith in, no singular subjectivity called the Imam. He plays hide and seek with us because he is a changeable creature, a chameleon, and perhaps with all his masking, he may even, in the words of Federman, be considered fraudulent.

Looking back momentarily in summary, postmodern devices such as fragmented subjectivities, fractured or mythical time, multiple beginnings and multiple endings, and dovetailing narratives all work together with those multiple ontological zones of Foucault's heterotopic space to problematize the notion of representation, to question the relationship between the presence and absence of *one, true* world. And, as I have shown, not one but many worlds/zones exist in *The Satanic Verses* and *The Fall of the Imam*. And in my next chapter I'll explore another facet of postmodernism's crisis of representation. Following the postmodern form of these novels is a postmodern content. Using François Lyotard's postmodern condition which talks about the intersection of postmodernism and knowledge, I claim, along with Lyotard, that the availability of knowledge in any direct manner and the inherent meta-narratives of modernism are both impossible and undesirable.

Because this is so, I believe that Salman Rushdie and Nawal el Saadawi, in postmodern fashion, both critique the meta-narrative of Islam, Rushdie because of the issue of absolute knowledge of Quoranic interpretation by religious leaders, and el Saadawi because of Islam's oppressive attitudes towards Muslim women.

CHAPTER THREE

Salman Rushdie's Postmodern Critique of Islam

In the previous chapter I discussed the postmodern form of *The Satanic Verses* and *The Fall of the Imam* and the textual strategies that problematize the idea of a fixed, identifiable and true reality, showing, via Saussure, how the formula between signifier and signified breaks down homogeneity and unification, leaving heterogeneity and contradiction. A similar postmodern critique exists in relation to the content of both novels: both novels critique the rising fundamentalism of Islam, an Islam that propagates one Truth. While Rushdie and el Saadawi's interests and critiques are somewhat different — Rushdie concerns himself with the relationship between doubt and fundamental Islamic doctrine (including those who interpret doctrine, Muhammad's perfect status, and the Quran's createdness), while el Saadawi concerns herself with the patriarchal structure of fundamental Islamic doctrine and its subordination of women — both level critiques at an Islam that excludes heterogeneity and contradiction and that perpetuates homogeneity and unification, one **Truth**. In the following two chapters, I use Jean

François Lyotard's critique of knowledge presented in his *Postmodern Condition: a Report on Knowledge* to anchor my analysis of how Rushdie (present chapter) and el Saadawi (final chapter) critique the metanarrative of Islam.

In his *Postmodern Condition: a Report on Knowledge* Lyotard critiques the foundations of western knowledge. *Postmodern Condition* was commissioned by the Canadian Government to study

the condition of knowledge in the most highly developed societies. I have decided to use the word *postmodern* to describe that condition. The word is in current use on the American continent among sociologists and critics; it designates the state of our culture following the transformations which, since the end of the nineteenth century, have altered the game rules for science, literature, and the arts. (xxiii)⁴

Although Lyotard's official subject matter is the status of science, technology, technocracy and the control of knowledge, he also concerns himself with the crisis of representation whose fundamental categories are those of accuracy and Truth. As with our previous discussion, Lyotard talks of the relation between the word and the world, postulating that the word "truth" does not

⁴ While Lyotard is at times seemingly unclear or contradictory as to whether postmodernism is a state of modernism or whether it follows modernism (see Jameson's *Foreword to The Postmodern Condition*), it is possible to accept his ambiguity if one goes along with McHale's postulations that the 'post' in postmodern is a shift in the dominant. Modernism need not be cut out of the picture, rather, it takes a back seat. As Jameson says "Lyotard sees postmodernism as a moment of discontent with a disintegration of this or that high modernist style — cyclical, and ever emerging" (xvi).

refer to the relational notion of truth as a successful correspondence between word and world. Lyotard begins his critique with science and believes that certain aspects of contemporary science point to the need for a 'postmodern' view of the world to replace the modern view. Lyotard designates postmodernism as a general condition of contemporary western civilization, one in which "grand narratives of legitimation" are no longer credible. By "grand narratives" he means, in the first instance, over-arching philosophies of history like the Enlightenment story of the progress of reason and freedom, Hegel's dialectic of Spirit coming to know itself, and Marx's theories of human production via class conflict which culminates in proletarian revolution. For Lyotard, these "metanarratives" instantiate a specifically modern approach to the problem of legitimation: "I will use the term modern [referring to the postmodern condition of today] to designate any science that legitimates itself with reference to a metadiscourse...making an explicit appeal to some grand narrative, such as the dialectics of Spirit, the hermeneutics of meaning, the emancipation of the rational or working subject, or the creation of wealth" (xxiii). Metadiscourse narrates a story about the whole of human history which purports to guarantee that the norms and rules of modern sciences and modern political processes are themselves legitimate. And, not surprising to Lyotard, the story guarantees *the Truth* of those metadiscourses.

Nancy Fraser and Linda Nicholson, in "Feminism and Postmodernism" point out that in Lyotard's conception of legitimating metanarrative, the stress properly belongs more on meta than on narrative. They propose that metanarrative transcends the philosophical discourse to include discourses that are totalizing social theories which are reductionist, simplistic, self-legitimizing and which claim universal Truth:

For what most interests him about the Enlightenment, Hegelian and Marxist stories is what they share with other, non-narrative forms of philosophy. Like ahistorical epistemologies and moral theories, they aim to show that specific first-order discursive practices, are well-formed and capable of yielding true and just results. "True" and "just" here mean something more than results reached by adhering scrupulously to the constitutive rules of given scientific and political games. They mean, rather, results which correspond to Truth and Justice as they really are in themselves independently of contingent, historical social practices. Thus, in Lyotard's view, a metanarrative is meta in a very strong sense. It purports to be a privileged discourse capable of situating, characterizing and evaluating all other discourses, but not itself infected by the historicity and contingency which render first-order discourses potentially distorted and in need of legitimation. (376-377)

To answer the question where does legitimation reside in the postmodern era, Lyotard calls for plural, local and immanent discourses. Plurality in fields like science, he argues, means that participants no longer look to foundational or prescriptive philosophies, but rather within their own local dis-

courses, to question and problematize legitimation, to engage at the level of practice. Lyotard's watchwords of postmodernism become "a war waged on totality; let us be witness to the unrepresentable; let us activate the differences and save the honour of the name" (82), and "a postmodern knowledge that refines our sensitivity to differences and reinforces our ability to tolerate the incommensurable. Its principle is not the expert's homology, but the inventor's paralogy" (xxv).

While a number of theorists criticise Lyotard's 'postmodern condition' on grounds that it, too, is a metanarrative, that it is undertheorized, that it lacks specificity, that its basis of anti-foundational philosophy excludes important critical social categories, and that Lyotard tosses out all pragmatic options,⁵ I believe that his focus on the arbitrariness and self-legitimizing properties of *Truth* and his position, instead, on local *truths*, is valuable in the context of a critique of Islam which both Salman Rushdie and Nawal el Saadawi attempt in their texts. In this chapter I submit a local critique of the metanarratives/grand narratives of Islam from Salman Rushdie's Anglo-Indian perspective. Recalling our previous discussion of anti-representation, Lyotard argues that representations in any sense, be they in philosophy, religion, art, dance, or architecture, do not bring us any closer to the 'real' because words are symbolic and lack a direct relationship to an objective real-

⁵ See critiques of Lyotard in the same article by Fraser & Nicholson, and in E. Kellner, "Postmodernism as Social Theory" in *Theory, Culture, and Society*, v. 5, 1988, pp. 248-256.

ity. His critique of metanarratives that purport to legitimate the idea of one Truth and to offer a universalistic and totalizing account of science, history, society, or whatever, delegitimizes those metanarratives:

In contemporary society and culture... — postmodern culture — the question of the legitimation of knowledge is formulated in different terms. The grand narrative has lost its credibility, regardless of what mode of unification it uses, regardless of whether it is a speculative narrative or a narrative of emancipation. (37)

His critique of representation and his critique of grand narratives is a way into Rushdie's critique of Islam and, as he views it, its totalizing Truth: Rushdie expresses his sensitivity to the absolute nature of the power of interpretation by religious figures of the sacred writings of Islam, and the lack of space in those discourses for dissent from those fundamental views.

As the above discussion insists, absolutes are a nemesis to postmodern orientations. As such, absolutes are chipped away from a number of directions, one being from the changing role of the author. As M. Foucault relates, readers can no longer appeal to the author's ultimate knowledge of the text, a notion born along the line of modern science. In his 1979 essay "What is an Author," Foucault contends that the notion of authorship first emerged not in literature but in the sciences during the Middle Ages when an author's prestige was required for authenticity of scientific statements. While the importance of the literary author burgeoned in the modern epoch, emerging about

the same time as English empiricism, French rationalism, and faith in the Reformation — all of which emphasised the importance of the individual, the one who was at the center of literary production, the sole keeper of her/his textual “truth” (143). But, as Roland Barthes states as early as 1977, the author is dead. No longer is s/he the privileged center of the literary process, the one who is the knowledge keeper and producer, the one who interprets her/his textual truth. On the contrary, the position of the postmodern author is much diminished. S/he gives up ownership once the text is produced, does not interpret the text with a singular true interpretation, and her/his biography is not sought as a clue to the right meaning of the text. While some critics see the death of authorship as extreme most postmodernists yield to the notion that authorial authority is diminished considerably.

Are Rushdie and el Saadawi the (author)ities of their texts? Not so. What looks like authority in *The Fall of the Imam*, the Author's Preface, which usually signals some legitimation, justification, or insight into the direction and interpretation of a work — in other words, guidance from the authorial control center to the reader — is none other than the work of a scribe. El Saadawi relates how characters and narrative force their way to the foreground and occupy center stage to control their destinies. As a result, el Saadawi is not the creator of the stories and their truths, but their scribe. In her own words, “And as soon as I sat down again in front of my paper, they started moving over the lines, all by themselves, writing their own story out.

I did not have to interfere at all with their personal or their public life, except every now and then when I was obliged to do so to prevent some of them from using words which would be considered sacrilegious, or a violation of the human values we respect" (Preface). So, el Saadawi does not legitimate the stories through a preface, but turns the value of a preface on its head by her role as scribe.

Similarly, Salman Rushdie is not creator, but scribe cum Salman Farsi. Some, like David Meyers, even believe Rushdie overstates his attempt to extricate himself from authority: "As an intellectual, post-modernist writer he is so interested in deconstructing the Romantic notion of the artist inspired by God that he grotesquely overstates the opposite case purely for the sake of a clever metaphor" (151). Whatever the verdict, Rushdie, using his given name for the character of the scribe, Salman becomes, in the words of McHale, the "paper author, the author as a guest in his own text" (*Postmodernist Fiction* 205). And the textual Salman scribes events, writes down what is told to him by Mahound/Muhammad, the authority, because his words have come from God. Salman is simply the messenger. When he pushes the limits of his role as scribe, when he becomes creator, he courts trouble (as does our friend, Salman Rushdie, since the publication of *The Satanic Verses*). In the words of Saladin Chamcha "texts are authorless" (136). Hence, for both *The Fall of the Imam* and *The Satanic Verses* we have authors who bow away from the authority of ivory towers.

While Rushdie takes care to have his work scribed, critics are still very interested in his critique of Islam and many do acknowledge a postmodern orientation regarding that critique. The following critics quickly labelled *The Satanic Verses* as postmodern from its publication. Saadai A. Simawa in "Rushdie's *The Satanic Verses* and Heretical Literature in Islam" (1990), refers both to Rushdie's magical realism and his "postmodern critique of Islam" (185-187); Rudolf Bader, in *The "The Satanic Verses: An Intercultural Experiment by Salman Rushdie"* (1992), calls the text "a typical postcolonial, postmodernist novel attempting, by means of...the dangerous experiment of challenging such vital contemporary issues as cultural translation with a field of multicultural tension" (75); David Myers, in "From Satiric Farce to Tragic Epiphany: Salman Rushdie's *The Satanic Verses*" (1990), calls Rushdie "a post-modernist agnostic who feels driven to part-playful and part-anguished metaphysical speculation as a compensation for his loss of faith" (148); Akeel Bilgrami, in "Rushdie and the Reform of Islam" (1988), says that Rushdie's themes "have always [been] written with irreverence...not just about Islam but also about post-independence India and Pakistan and about post-World War Britain. His is not the literature which produces an angle of regard on its subject and in this it is part of a by now well entrenched post-modern tradition of novelistic writing" (181), and again in 1990 in "Rushdie, Islam and Postcolonial Defensiveness" he refers to Rushdie's "postmodern cultural critical stance [where] *The Satanic Verses* repudiated the historicist

restriction of appropriate targets for appropriate stances; it repudiated the restriction as *itself* another Orientalist withholding of the creative possibilities of Islam for its own self-understanding and self-criticism" (309); Sara Suleri, in "Whither Rushdie?" (1991), calls for a transliterary contextual reading so that "the novel can be read as anything other than a postmodern flirtation with the liberties of satire" (210); Marlena G. Corcoran, in "A Forum on *The Satanic Verses*" (1990), asserts that "In its questioning of both the transmission of sacred text and contemporary representations of writing, *The Satanic Verses* may well be the first postmodern Islamic novel" (158); Timothy Brennan, in *Salman Rushdie and the Third World* (1989), sees Rushdie's works as "revisionist postmodern tales" (140-141); Esmail Kho'i, in his poem "Letter to Salman Rushdie" (1990), laments Rushdie's "postmodern involvement with the prehistoric sub-dinosaur who has made a fool of history" (17); and, finally, Mark Edmundson, in "Prophet of a New Postmodernism" (1989), recognizes the cultural hybridity of the novel as postmodern (62-71). All acknowledge, either in support or non-support, that Rushdie's critique of Islam is a postmodern endeavour. They point to Rushdie's rejection of the grandnarrative with its legitimacy to the *Truth*, concurring with Rushdie's Swatilekha that grandnarratives no longer have a place in the foreground: "All metaphors are capable of misinterpretation...that society was orchestrated by *grand narratives*: history, economics, ethics, the oldest of the grand narratives, that is, religious faith" (*Verses* 537).

Words have yet to run thin on the subject of Rushdie and his critique of Islam. People are still interested/critical/angry/supportive etc. of the issue. Indeed, Khomeini's fatwa against Rushdie is once again reaffirmed this year, 1994, as I write this thesis. Because of the vast amounts of literature written on this issue, how, then, can we give shape to the nature of Rushdie's critique? In the following I delineate five areas. First, Rushdie scorns the narrowness of absolutes in general presenting a number of absolute power centers and highlighting their inflexible and oppressive nature; second, to a monocratic Islam, Rushdie juxtaposes a multiplicity of religious form symbolised by his references to Hinduism and by the scribe Salman Farsi; third, Rushdie critiques the powerful Islamic clerics, the Thought Police, as he calls them, and undermines their authority as absolute interpreters of Islam; fourth, he questions the deification of Muhammad and sees him not as divine but as human, capable of erring; and fifth, he affronts the 'createdness' of the Quran seeing it not as a divine narrative but as a human construction. All challenge grand narratives that, as Lyotard states "have lost their credibility, regardless of what mode of unification they use" (10), and that, as Swatilekha asserts once again, "are being manipulated by the theocracy and various political elements in an entirely regressive way" (*Verses* 537). In closing, I offer the reasoning that Rushdie critiques the metanarrative of Islam not only to expose and diffuse the power of absoluteness, but to admit

heterogeneity, to make a place for difference. In essence, Rushdie begins a re-visioning of Islam as it was, and Islam as it is today in a transnational world.

The Satanic Verses is a potpourri of absolutes and, as Rushdie admits to interviewer Madhu Jain, "other fundamentalisms [that are] in the beginning and the end of the novel" (*India Today* 09/15/88 in *File* 39). To Rushdie, absolutes are laughable, incomprehensible, damaging, even terrifying, as is Margaret Thatcher, the then political head of Britain, whom he satirizes as Mrs. Torture and Maggie the Bitch. Known also as Iron Lady, her unyielding agenda, according to the narrative, is that of a god: she intends to create, invent, reinvent, and let nothing get in her way. Hal Valance sums up her agenda:

She's radical all right. What she wants — what she actually thinks she can fucking *achieve* — is literally to reinvent a whole goddamn new middle class in this country. Get rid of the old wholly incompetent buggers from fucking Surrey and Hampshire, and bring in the new. People without background, without history. Hungry people....Nobody's ever tried to replace a whole fucking *class* before....The intellectuals, too. (*Verses* 270)

Ayesha the butterfly orphan/prophetess, too, is unwilling to yield. She has the power of the enchantress Circe to turn all men into pigs (484) and the power to lead her lemming followers off cliffs (484). As bizarre as the trek may seem with a trailing Mercedes and a flown-in father/husband, Ayesha's extreme authority brings equally bizarre results. When confronted with her

own contradictions she creates an even more ironclad system of belief, relying on dreams and trance states, and she ignores multiple catastrophes and deaths along the way. Like the Pied Piper (484), Ayesha finally leads her pilgrim followers "to death with an absolutism that had begun to both frighten and impress" (482). With no flexibility, Ayesha and her authority destroy the world they occupy.

Maggie the Bitch and Ayesha the butterfly orphan/prophetess are but two examples of a multitude of absolute belief systems that Rushdie satirises to undermine their authority. One can add other examples like Eugene Dumsday whose creationist scientist attitude holds Darwin responsible for American drug culture (77); like Tavleen the highjacker who takes her religious zeal to the extremes of murder and martyrdom (SV84); like Ayesha's Imam who cannot accommodate the idea of an illegitimate foundling, condemning this Devil's child to death by stoning (496); like Hind of Jahilia who cannot make a truce to accept Allah over Al-Lat so fights to the extreme of death for her goddesses (121); like Ayesha, the Empress Pahlavi, whose father the Shah of Iran attempts to wipe out all references to Iran's history by introducing a new calendar, the Pahlavi calendar, that celebrates beginning with the year 2500, years of continuous monarchy (Fischer and Abedi 418); and like the Imam of Iran who controls the movement of history, whose very word makes a revolution, and who believes in the eternal timeless God (209-215). All are references to absolutisms which have no flexibility, no room for change, no desire to accommodate other ideas, no acknowledgement of

vairance, multiplicity or diversity. They are ends of continuums that are "unbending, monomaniacal, tyrannical and brittle" (*Verses* 81). And Rushdie's response to absolutes is dissent. As a writer, he feels that he offers space for dissent with his words. He creates other worlds for alternate truths to exist:

[dissent from all orthodoxies] from Conservative politics, that's a kind of orthodoxy under which we all live at the moment, it's important that there should be dissent from that. If radical politics were the orthodox in this country I think it would be important that there should be dissent from that too. One of the things that a writer can do is to say: Here is the way in which you're told you're supposed to look at the world, but actually there are also some other ways. Let us never believe that the way in which the people in power tell us to look at the world is the only way we can look, because if we do that, then there's a kind of appalling self-censorship. (*Bandung File* 01/17/89 in *File* 29)

The above echoes and reinforces the central commentary on religious orthodoxy, which Rushdie stresses applies to all religions in general but for him specifically to Islam. In his interview with Madhu Jain, just after the publication of his novel and before the furore erupted, Rushdie clarifies his views: "Actually, one of my major themes is religion and fanaticism. I have talked about the Islamic religion because that is what I know the most about. But the ideas about religious faith and the nature of religious experience and also the political implications of religious extremism are applicable with a few

variations to just about any religion" (*India Today* 09/15/88 in *File 39*).⁶ To contrast Islam's theocratic nature, he uses the example of the multifaceted nature of Hinduism. As the previous chapter outlines, Rushdie celebrates multiplicity "in good faith," the title of the essay from where the following remarks are taken:

Those who oppose the novel most vociferously today are of the opinion that intermingling with a different culture will inevitably weaken and ruin their own. I am of the opposite opinion. *The Satanic Verses* celebrates hybridity, impurity, intermingling, the transformation that comes of new and unexpected combinations of human beings, cultures, ideas, politics, movies, songs. It rejoices in mongrelization and fears the absolutism of the Pure. Mélange, hotch-potch, a bit of this and a bit of that is how newness enters the world. It is the great possibility that mass migration gives the world, and I have tried to embrace it. *The Satanic Verses* is for change-by-fusion, change-by-conjoining. It is a love-song to our mongrel selves. (4)

⁶ I, too, acknowledge a spectrum of religious belief within the Islamic tradition but for the purposes of my thesis, I choose, along with Rushdie, to focus on the fundamentalist aspects of Islam. For a definition of fundamentalist Islam and its linkage to the rise in 'radical-popular nationalism' in many Muslim countries today, see Mahmut Mutman's "Under the Sign of Orientalism: The West vs. Islam" (*Cultural Critique* winter 1992-93 p. 165-197). Mutman postulates that rising fundamentalism coincides historically with the a rejection of Western modernity, essentially a "rewriting of modernity as a fake and corrupted world and modernization as a false historical narrative" in the ever-progressing argument of East vs West (165). Mutman explores his premise via E. Said's seminal studies on orientalism. As Mutman notes "If the 'death of God' is inscribed in the modern project, Islamic fundamentalism appears to be one good instance of Nietzsche's ironic remark about the multiple reversals of such an inscription: 'the return of the gods'" (166).

Rushdie portrays Hinduism as fluid and continually changing through the characters Gibreel Farishta and Salman Farisi. Now, even though Hinduism has its extreme fundamentalists, Rushdie chooses to present its multiple nature. James Harrison's summary of Hinduism helps to assess those aspects of Hinduism that make it attractive to Rushdie. Harrison explains that at least four "truths" about Hinduism emerge from a historical look at the faith. First, that there is no attempt to deny, conceal, or simplify the variety and complexity of the world we live in, second, that as a consequence of historical invasions, Hinduism has incorporated ritual after ritual, deity after deity, and put them all to good use as manifestations of the variety and complexity of things, third, that Hinduism allows for participation on many different levels in many ways (18), and fourth, that Hinduism's belief in reincarnation emphasizes its reverence for life (20). Harrison believes that a religion like this is likely to seem much less militantly certain of its own monopoly of truth (19). Whether we take Harrison's bold face statements as accurate or not, it still does not deny that Rushdie, himself, brings the diversity of Hinduism to the discourse. From the pluralism of Indian culture in *Midnight's Children*, largely a product of the pluralism in Hinduism whose "multiplicity of deities and avatars bears witness to the number of other religions it has been able to incorporate" (52), to *The Satanic Verses* and its transmigration, reincarnation, hybridity of Hinduism where "Bombay is a culture of remakes" (*Verses* 64), and where "every god in the pantheon got his

or her chance to be a star" (24), Rushdie counterpoints Islam with a faith that is dynamic, multifaceted, hence less likely, perhaps, to monopolize the Truth.

Another support for a multifaceted religion is the character Salman Farisi. Appearing to be the symbol of a true convert, a true believer and follower of Muhammad's monotheism, Salman Farisi, Ruthven tells us, is Salman Al-Farisi, a Persian barber who first converted to Christianity, then later travelled to Syria and Central Arabia in search of the Prophet, and who, finally, became adopted into the Prophet's household. According to Ruthven, Salman Al-Farisi helped mastermind one of Muhammad's victories over the Meccans by persuading Muhammad to build a defensive ditch around the city of Medina (39). Such accolades describe a symbol of a true believer. Or is he? According with another historical figure, Addullah ibn Sa'ad, one of the Prophet's scribes, Salman Farisi changes and falsifies the words of Muhammad. Early Muslim commentator Tabari writes that Addullah ibn Sa'ad temporarily lost his faith and made transcriptions that went unnoticed. So, to undermine our convert 'Salman the Persian', we have Salman Farisi cum Addullah ibn Sa'ad, the doubter. And, this is not all. Brennan adds yet another layer to the 'Salman' of Salman Farisi, explaining how 'Salman' recalls the founder of Sufism, a more artistic and personal brand of Islam and a more moderate line of Islam (156). In the end, then, the character Salman Farisi begins as orthodox then translates into a more heterogeneous symbol to challenge and undermine absolutism.

Rushdie believes that Islam is highly orthodox and fundamental because those who have the power to interpret religion make it so. Referring to Pakistan and Zia he condemns its path of the absolute in his essay "Zia Unmourned":

The medieval, misogynistic, stultifying ideology that Zia imposed on Pakistan in his 'Islamization' program was the ugliest possible face of the faith....To be a believer is not by any means to be a zealot. Islam in the Indo-Pakistani subcontinent has developed historically along moderate lines, with a strong strain of pluralistic Sufi philosophy; Zia was this Islam's enemy. (*The Nation* 09/19/88 188-189)

In an interview just six weeks before Khomeini issued the fatwa, Rushdie anticipated that the mullahs would not like his book and he condemned the power of the clerics on two separate occasions. On the first, he said: "a powerful tribe of clerics has taken over Islam. These are the contemporary Thought Police" (*Observer* 01/22/89 in *File* 74). A few days later he said: "I didn't write it for the mullahs. I've seen what the mullahs have done in Pakistan over the past 11 years — the level of oppression instituted there by islamisation. I've seen, too, how almost all the poets in Pakistan were in exile in England during that period" (*Bandung File* 01/27/89 in *File* 27). Before we follow Rushdie's critique of those who interpret Islam, let us first look at how and why interpretation becomes central to the debate, an explanation that begins with the oral nature of the Quran. Fischer explains that although the

Quran is a literary text, its essence is oral and dialogic because of factors like Muhammad's illiteracy, the early state of Arabic script, the centrality of dialogues in the Quran, and the pedagogy of never studying alone or with a text alone (102-103). In essence, Muslim tradition trusts orality over text because the words of the Quran came from God to Muhammad before they were written. As such, orthodoxy rejects corrections to the words of God and Muhammad that purport to improve grammar and grammatical meaning. Fischer offers an instance of the negative consequences of tampering with the authority of orality. In 1958 two shaykhs were tried, forced to recant, and expelled from Cairo's al-Zahar University for issuing a decree allowing 'improved' or grammatically corrected texts whose corrections were based on reason (105). Truly, orality is coveted as the way, and propogated by such well-known maxims as the following: "He who obtains knowledge orally from a master, he is safe from being misled and from misreadings. But he who obtains knowledge from books, his knowledge is nil according to those who know" (106).

From oral recitation, then, comes interpretation because those who recite the Quran must also interpret the Quran. For Shiite Muslims, much responsibility lies with the Imams (as opposed to Sunis who rely less on the Imams than on the sunna, the precedents of the Prophet and his Companions). In fact, Fischer points out that Imams are called "the speaking Qur'an" (106), so that what an Imam does is a *hujjat* or authoritative precedent (120). It is an

easy step from here to postulate that the differences among recitations, then, are more than a matter of stylistics: they also concern meanings (107). In the case of the establishment of the Islamic Republic of Iran, Fischer says, the sacred and the secular come together to rule the Islamic state, with the words of the Imam becoming "the standard of meaning" (121).

In his article "Newspeak: Language and Change in Revolutionary Iran," Haggay Ram gives us a look at how it evolved that "the words of the Imam became the standard of meaning" in Iran. Iran's transition from the Shah's regime to an Islamic government necessitated that the power of the clerics become legitimated. Ram takes us through the transformation of the word the *Velayat* to demonstrate how clerics became legitimated powers to interpret the Truth. The *velayat* is found in both the Quran and hadith literature and means 'to be near or close' and according to Shiite doctrine, the right to assume the *velayat* exclusively belongs to the Prophet, and after him the Imams (200). So it was, then, that the new Islamic government appropriated the word and gave it its new meanings of 'govern, rule, protect, guardianship, trusteeship', making it so that the ulama begat supreme political and legal authority in the state. Apropos of Khomeini, Ram says that he began as *an Imam*, but as the revolution progressed and as the Islamic state became more and more established, Khomeini became *The Imam*. Beyond becoming a ruler, a protector, and a guardian, Khomeini assumed *velayat* and was put on equal footing with the Prophet. In the words of one prayer leader "both

[Khomeini and the Prophet] are responsible for the revival of faith and humanity and for awakening the depressed people" (201). Through obligatory Friday prayer sessions and sermons that promulgate the previous notion, Khomeini, indeed, kept his word as the standard of meaning.

Rushdie gives life to two Imams who rule as gods but they are without virtue. I point out in a previous section how an Imam who crosses paths with Ayesha, the butterfly seer, is a leader without compassion, a leader who deals with doubt with decrees of death. This Imam surfaces in the section "The Parting of the Arabian Sea" where a crowd of Friday prayer goers discovers a foundling on the steps of the mosque. When Ayesha and the Imam arrive to assess the situation replete with religious overtones (a baby in a basket and a crowd parting like the sea (Moses), and a crowd filled with "doubt and confusion"), the Imam, supported by Ayesha, passes judgement that the illegitimate child "born in devilment, the Devil's child" (*Verses* 496). The crowd, no longer confused, stones the child to death. As the prophetess declares, "only the pure can be with the pure." Of course, we have the other Imam, Khomeini, whom Rushdie parodies in a short section of ten pages. The effect, though, is vile and Fischer wonders about the lack of attention the section received compared to other sections when "Khomeini, early in the revolution, made it a crime to vilify him or the revolution" (433). What kind of man/Imam is Imam of *The Satanic Verses*? According to Saadi Simawe, he represents the idea of religious fanaticism in general, and Islamic fundamen-

talism in particular (193). This Imam is in exile — displaced from Paris to London — and, as a man of little substance, he is likened to a waiting room, a photograph, air, and living stone; he is a man capable of plotting the death of a political rival, that of the Empress (Pahlavi); he is a man who compromises his values, who takes refuge in a modern city he despises for its modernness while being determined to make a revolution against modernity; he is a man who condemns for all life, without hope of redemption, those who drink wine; he is a shrewd politician who gathers those like Bilal X around him whom he can use against his own people; he is a man of power, at the centre of a wheel, who pronounces judgements, no matter how severe, that become the fate of nations; finally he is more than a man, he is a god, a conjurer, linked in holy succession from Gibreel to Mahound to himself, the interpreter, who has the power to arrest time, turn Islam back to traditionalist values, to cease progress and science and rights, to burn books and trust the Book (205-211). Not a flattering portrayal of the man/Imam who lived to lead the Iranian Islamic nation. According to Rushdie, the Imam's revolution was a willingness to accommodate the death of many for the future, in the name of Love:

Seventy abreast, the people walk gravely towards the Empress's gates. In front of which her household guards are waiting in three ranks, lying, kneeling and standing, with machine-guns at the ready. The people are walking up the slope towards the guns; seventy at a time, they come into range; the guns babble,

and they die, and then the next seventy climb over the bodies of the dead, the guns giggle once again, and the hill of the dead grows higher.... 'You see how they love me,' says the disembodied voice. 'No tyranny on earth can withstand the power of this slow, walking love.'

'This isn't love,' Gibreel, weeping, replies. 'It's hate' (213-214).

Simawe believes that this Imam is a flat character, one that is filled only with powers of the absolute, one that eschews Islamic virtues for corruption: "In proclaiming that History and Knowledge were completed with the death of Mahound, the Imam virtually turned Mahound and the Quran into idols, the very practices that Mahound revolted against thirteen centuries ago. In his rejection of History, Time, Change, and Progress, the Imam has exiled himself in the idolised past and waged Jihad (holy war) against humanity and life. Furthermore, in abusing the Archangel Gibreel by riding him like a flying carpet — in contrast to Mahound who used to let the Archangel wrestle him to the ground — the exiled Imam is denying the human and humane possibilities of the moral imagination" (192-93). In short, the Imam is absolute power. But in the end, he is not immune to his use of power. Just as he transforms the world and its people, he, too, is transformed. His hunger for power, his greed is absolute horror:

Down she tumbles, Al-Lat queen of the night; crashes upside-down to earth, crushing her head to bits....And Gibreel, looking away from her in horror, sees the Imam grown monstrous, lying in the palace forecourt with his mouth yawning open at the

gates; as the people march through the gates he swallows them whole...now every clock in the capital city of Desh begins to chime, and goes on unceasingly, beyond twelve, beyond twenty-four, beyond one thousand and one, announcing the end of time, the hour that is beyond measuring, the hour of the exile's return, of the victory of water over wine, of the commencement of the Untime of the Imam. (*Verses* 215)

One fundamental system of tyranny, one tyrannical leader replaces another, this one perhaps more horrific than the last. This leader, this Imam, can claim legitimacy in the name of God, Gibreel, Muhammad, the chain of power. In fact, Khomeini issued a fatwa against Rushdie for the blasphemous book, even though, legitimately, the Imam did not have the power to deliver the edict unless he thought himself to have the powers of a god. Several critics point out that he is allowed his opinion but that he did not have the power to incite Muslims to kill for money, nor did he have the office to pass judgment without trial on Rushdie.⁷ In support of Rushdie's portrayal of Khomeini, Iranian poet, Esmail Kho'i, in 1990, writes a poem incorporating some of Rushdie's own images. Itself a pastiche of intertextual references, written in the form of a letter, and accompanied by sketches, the poem is too long to quote in its entirety but a few verses will support the accuracy of Rushdie's postmodern critique:

⁷ See, for example Harrison (1992), Fischer (1990), Ruthven (1990), Brennan (1989).

Dear Mr. Rushdie,
I am sorry
and do worry
about your post-modern involvement
with the prehistoric sub-dinosaur
who has made a
fool of history:
a devolution
of revolution
a bigger problem
of our solution,
a yesterday
of tomorrow,
to our dismay
and our sorrow.
Civilized journalists label us as
'a barbaric nation':
Because we have a towering culture
on whose pinnacle,
now drawn in blood,
in the name of God,
squats a nation-devouring vulture
who has decided to send you to Hell:
Which means,
dear Salman,
he wants to have you in today's Iran;
for, for Shaitan's sake,
where the hell is Hell,
if not a nowhere or an anytime
of a place out of time

or a time out of place
in which the mystery
of the lie in the truth
and the truth in the lie
of the history
of the human race
cannot unravel
in the tales of the doomed
i.e. the bloody,
i.e. the bleeding,
Godless bastards
like you and me
need a chance to tell
to a cultural world
that is divided,
badly divided,
into the After and Before the Imam:
A world divided,
sadly divided,
into those against and those for
the Imam?
Yes,
where the hell is Hell,
if not a nowhere out of human time,
like that bloody, i.e. bleeding,
Motherland of mine
in whose raped villages and
plundered cities
the cocks and clocks
have all begun to crow and chime

'The Commencement of
The Imam's Untime'? (17)

Not only does he criticise religious interpreters, but Rushdie bestows a shroud of doubt around Muhammad, questioning the notion of a perfect, divine Muhammad, a Prophet without flaws. The doctrinal argument about Muhammad, whether he is divine and beyond foibles or whether he is a human with foibles, is, however, not Rushdie's invention. Simawe points out that the doctrinal argument enjoyed public debate during the Renaissance of Islam (9-10th centuries) but that it was not until the beginning of the tenth century (A.D. 900) that "age of free speculation ended when the door of *Ijtihad* (the right to individual reasoning in religious matters) was closed," and he believes that Rushdie's *The Satanic Verses* "reactivates those long-forbidden theological questions and debates and questions their validity as rational questions in the twentieth century" (186).

The Muhammad of history, however, is not necessarily the Muhammad of the Muslim psyche for in many traditions, he is almost deified. His character from the largest and most complex attributes to the small details of behaviour have become the absolute model for Muslim life. Ruthven summarises how a history of moral and physical perfection follows Muhammad through each era. For instance, stories of miracles tell of his moral perfection. It is said that a divine aura settled on his father just before his conception, that angels attended his birth, that during childhood angels opened his breast and cleansed his heart of all sin. Likewise, stories of the absence of physical

impurities abound. It is said that he was born fully circumcised, the earth swallowed his excrement, hairs and nail-clippings were collected as talismans, the fragrance of his presence was such that it left its beautiful odour of musk around those to whom he appeared in dreams, his footprint is preserved from his miraculous Night Journey to Jerusalem and is still venerated in the Dome of the Rock (32). Even mystics and poets raise Muhammad to the sacred, as a poem by Abdul Karim al Jili, attests:

O Centre of the compass! O inmost ground of truth!
 O pivot of necessity and contingency!
 O eye of the entire circle of existence! O point of the Quran...
 Thou are transcendent, nay thou are immanent, nay thine
 is all that is known and unknown, everlasting and
 perishable.
 Thine in reality is Being and not-being... (33)

In addition, the smallest details of his behaviour become examples to be emulated, from the cut of his beard, to the food he liked, to how he dressed. Many Muslims follow his example and follow the advice of medieval theologian, al Ghazali who writes, "imitate the Messenger of God in all his coming and going, his movements and rest, in his way of eating, his attitude, his sleep and his talk.... That means, you have to sit while putting on trousers, and to stand when winding a turban, and to begin with the right foot when putting on shoes" (34).

Rushdie is quite aware of the doctrinal argument about Muhammad and he finds Muhammad an interesting historical figure: "he is, after all, the only prophet who exists even partially in history.... The interesting thing about Muhammed is that there is objective information about him other than the sacred text" (*Bandung File 01/27/89 in File 28*). He also acknowledges the mystical side of Muhammad, saying that although he didn't believe that Muhammad had a revelation, he did not doubt his sincerity either that he had had a genuine mystical experience. This conundrum, if you like, was probably the impetus for his book. While he is the first to acknowledge the tolerant side of Muhammad — Muhammad had only five or six people executed after the re-taking of Mecca — it is Muhammad's brief flirtation with compromise and doubt that interests him and which fundamentalism today denies (29). Ruthven tells us that in a certain Quranic passage, Muhammad, himself, eschews supernatural powers and that he does not wish to be worshipped: "Say: 'I have no power to profit for myself, or hurt, but as God will. Had I knowledge of the Unseen I would have acquired much good, and evil would not have touched me. I am only a warner, and a bearer of good tidings, to a people believing'" (31). Rushdie, in his flamboyant style, wishes to reopen the doctrinal argument of prophet versus human to remind those who venerate Muhammad and those who use his figure for pursuing absolute orthodoxy that Muhammad has a human side. He doggedly undercuts Muhammad's divine character to bring doubt to Islamic fundamentalism. Rushdie's

Muhammed is Mahound. Neither "Mahomet (he-for-whom-thanks-should-be-given), nor Moehammered (he-who-goes-up-and-down-old-Coney), Mahound/Muhammad is the medieval European version of Muhammad, whom Christians presumed the infidel Muslims worshipped as God. Is it blasphemy, as many suggest, or is it "capturing the prophet's proud and steadfast espousal of a great revolutionary idea in the years when the idea was derided by the establishment of Mecca and Muhammed himself was scorned and ridiculed" as David Meyers suggests (156-157)? Whatever the verdict, the name, Mahound indeed, undercuts the more dignified and sacred name Muhammed. Rushdie's rationale? To regain Muhammad's humanity and its strength: "To turn insults into strengths, whigs, tories, blacks all chose to wear with pride the names they were given in scorn; likewise, our mountain-climbing, prophet-motivated solitary is to be the medieval baby-frightener, the Devil's synonym: Mahound" (*Verses* 93).

Rushdie's human Mahound/Muhammad, is someone fraught with physical and moral foibles, therefore someone whose virtuousness is to be doubted. Consider the young Mahound/Muhammad, this "mortal man's" (109) unflattering physical appearance: "high forehead, eaglenose, broad shoulders, narrow hips, brooding, large eyes, long lashes like a girl's, strides too long for his legs, rapid walk, no soft-bellied usurer, dressed in two pieces of plain cloth" (93). As a mortal his skin is "cut up" when he wrestles with Gibreel (122) and as businessman-turned prophet (play on *profit*), he has excellent manage-

ment skills (118). Does this businessman/profiteer stand to gain personally from his divine experiences? Indeed, he reasons "But I, too, have much to gain. The souls of the city, of the world, surely they are worth three angels?" (111). As the years pass and his religion grows in popularity, his tarnished, human moral character remains in the foreground. His business sense serves him well. He lives like a banished man who must survive by "lawlessness" and without "scruples" (363). His old business sense helps him make the laws of his faith, laws about how to fart, with which hand to clean one's behind, how much to eat, how deeply to sleep, which sexual positions are divinely sanctioned, forbidden subjects of conversation, parts of the body not to be scratched, how to bleed animals, how a man should be buried, and how a man's property should be divided (364). And, as the grocer grumbles, the rules for Mahound/Muhammad do not necessarily match the rules for the people. While the male populace can marry up to four wives, Mahound/Muhammad has twelve (379). In Rushdie's scenario, rather than the mystical venerated god of stories, Mahound/Muhammad is a mortal man dealing with daily living issues and keeping count of his gains and losses.

Rushdie's most powerful way of undermining Muhammad/Mahound is by casting doubt on Mahound's/Muhammad's mystical revelations, first by the satanic verses episodes, then by the revelations that were to make Islamic laws. The satanic verses episode comes from Medinan verses, although many exegetes deny this existence. They tell of Muhammad's mistaken inclusion of three female deities into his religious faith. The story follows that Gabriel

would periodically ask Muhammad to recite the Quran back to him and that at the satanic verses insertion, Gabriel denied bringing them to Muhammad and amends were made accordingly (Fischer 408). Rushdie, of course, uses this story in his section "Mahound" by endowing Mahound/Muhammad with doubt about absolute faith, and about being tested by God re: the Devil.

Rushdie even echoes those exegetes who see the abrogation of the verses as an abrogation of Shaitan: "He stands in front of the statues of the Three and announces the abrogation of the verses which Shaitan whispered in his ear. These verses are banished from the true recitation, *al-qur'an*. New verses are thundered in their place" (*Verses* 124). Once said, though, it is difficult to wipe memory clean. The story of the satanic verses remains/persists in hadith literature to cast doubt.

Rushdie also shows Mahound/Muhammad to be a power seeking prophet whose "matter of fact" revelations become suspicious. The suspicion is that, Mahound/Muhammad, in human fashion, constructed laws and revelations to suit his needs. In his later years, instead of receiving divine revelations then proceeding to make secular laws from the revelations, Mahound/Muhammad makes the reverse happen. He makes secular laws then seeks revelations to confirm his laws, as with the issue of the acceptable number of wives. Salman Farsi notices the work of the older, more successful Mahound/Muhammad, the leader of monotheistic Islam. He notices how "useful and well timed the angel's revelations tended to be" how they follow

and support Mahound's/Muhammad's pronouncements. He begins to doubt whether Mahound/Muhammad is really having revelations because the revelations and laws are too businesslike, like Mahound/Muhammad, himself. In the end, doubting Mahound/Muhammad leads to doubting God:

Salman the Persian got to wondering what manner of God this was that sounded so much like a businessman...because he recalled that of course Mahound himself had been a businessman, and a damned successful one at that, a person to whom organization and rules came naturally, so how excessively convenient it was that he should come up with such a businesslike archangel, who handed down the management decisions of this highly corporate, if non-corporeal, God. (364)

A young businesslike Mahound/Muhammad ages into a mature businesslike man, one whose moral integrity as the leader of a new religion is in doubt. As Salman complains "I began to get a bad smell in my nose" (365). Could one trust Mahound's/Muhammad's revelations? That became Salman Farsi's question. And when the narrative leaves Mahound/Muhammad behind, he leaves both a divine Mahound/Muhammad and a human Mahound/Muhammad. In the words of Ayesha, his wife, "If there be any here who worshipped the Messenger, let them grieve, for Mahound is dead; but if there be any here who worship God, then let them rejoice, for He is surely alive" (394).

From interpreters to Mahound/Muhammad to, the final step, Rushdie's critique of the authenticity of the Quran, the book of Islamic law and faith. If

Rushdie casts doubt on Muhammad's character then it must follow that he casts doubt on the authenticity of the Quran, on its authenticity as a divine, single text coming directly from God via Muhammad. Rushdie calls into question the 'uncreated' nature of the Quran, its completeness and reliability, its timeless existence as the word of God. Again, this debate is not new to Rushdie. The 'created' versus 'uncreated' debate exists since Muhammad. Simawe discusses how contestations arise as early as the first century of Islam when "amidst general Apostasy after the death of Muhammad, several individuals with poetic talents, for example Maslama and Sadjah, claim that they, too, were given holy books by the same divine sources" (186). The state-Islam fights and defeats these poets. Moreover, numerous others skeptics follow, as do other texts, and with each case, more doubt attaches itself to the debate. Rushdie, part historian, part writer, doubts the uncreative nature of the Quran and alleges it is not complete, that it contains material that is not supposed to be there, in essence that it was tampered with. Even though a counter argument exists that the Quran itself places upon Muslims an obligation of dealing with uncertainty, that uncertainty is characteristic of man's knowledge of the world, fundamentalists deny such discourse and Rushdie explores the connection between doubt and faith and the Quran. "Is the Quran the divine word of God?" asks Salman Farsi because he "wonders about a God that sounds so much like a businessman" (*Verses* 364). Salman Farsi takes it upon himself to test both Mahound's/Muhammad's moral char-

acter and the authentic nature of the text he scribes. As he writes the Quran from God's words through Mahound/Muhammad, he changes those words in minor ways, the result being that Mahound/Muhammad does not notice:

"Little things at first. If Mahound recited a verse in which God was described as *all-hearing, all-knowing*, I would write, *all-knowing, all-wise*. Here's the point: Mahound did not notice the alterations. So there I was, actually writing the Book, or re-writing, anyway, polluting the word of God with my own profane language" (367). Salman continues to make many changes, now major ones, and still Mahound/Muhammad does not notice: "So I went on with my devilment, changing verses, until one day I read my lines to him and saw him frown and shake his head as if to clear his mind, and then nod his approval slowly, but with a little doubt" (368). It is not until much later, when he converts Jahilia, that Mahound/Muhammad reveals to a captured Salman, the blasphemer, that he knows that Salman "set his words against the Words of God" (374). We are left with doubt, as Salman Farsi takes his leave into the night with a camel-train, and our doubt adds another layer to the list of historical contestations.

What, then, has Rushdie begun with his various critiques for Islam, for the Eastern literary tradition? Is it, as Brennan suggests, an anti-Quran, a counter-Quran simply because it challenges the original absolutist certainties with a theology of doubt? Brennan postulates that like his second novel, *Shame*, Rushdie's *The Satanic Verses* projects itself "as a rival Quran with

Rushdie as its prophet or as the guy at the head of a religion of doubt that Rushdie would like see expand and flourish (152). Brennan ends his discussion here, though, begging the question as to whether or not Rushdie's religion of doubt will itself become monotheistic and absolute (after all, he refers to Rushdie as the prophet). Rushdie's gift, I submit, is the ability to move beyond Lyotard's maxim that "a war be waged on totality" into a concretization of Lyotard's unfinished business of "let us activate the differences" (xxv). And that difference comes through a revisioning of history for people that exist in a transnational world, a world where local experiences are national and national experiences are international.

Rushdie's *revisioning of history*, to quote both Fischer and McHale, is part of an ongoing project. Not specifically referring to *The Satanic Verses* Fischer explains how *Midnight's Children* displaces and generates alternative stories of India, Pakistan, and Britain that rival the "civic-bookish standard histories of India and Pakistan, and the flat and unreal sociologies of Britain" (437). It is Amin Malik who takes on the task of furthering Lyotard's critique of metanarratives with respect to Rushdie's *The Satanic Verses*, taking one step into the world of Islam. By problematizing history, by acknowledging the problematic nature of the past as an object of knowledge for the present, history becomes plural, complex, personalised, local, selective, reconstructive. Postmodern versions not only destabilise official versions but rival them in their revisioning. Speaking of Rushdie's *oeuvre*, Malik says it well:

history represents a valuable source of inspiration, a liberator that can edify and enlighten us on complex, current issues. It functions as a crucial ideological ally that ultimately enriches the narrative of tentativeness and enhances the discourses of ambivalence: the primary aim is to probe rather than propound, question rather than confirm, doubt rather than dictate. History is in the eye of the beholder or projector; we do not have one history but histories. And Rushdie does not hide his hostility towards any belief system that posits "history" on fixed, sanctified grounds. Like all post-modern writers, he sees reality (whatever that may mean) as an unfinished project, a flux phenomenon that resists containment or closure and remains open to multiple renditions and projections. (182)

In keeping with the notion of ontology and worlds, perhaps, with Brian McHale, we can see that Rushdie's apocryphal history which supple-ments/supplants historical records as a juxtaposition that results in a tension. This tension, in turn, induces a form of ontological flicker between worlds. Once again, we ask which reality, which history? I believe that a case for Rushdie's reworking of history, of his revisioning of Islamic fundamentalist beliefs goes beyond the scope of this thesis. Perhaps, like some, the issue is already dead, or perhaps it is a non-issue and will remain in hiding with Rushdie. Or perhaps there never was an issue to begin with. Putting the issue of censorship aside for a moment, though, it seems that Rushdie certainly has tampered with Islam's history. I am certain that the world has not heard

the last of The Rushdie Affair, or the last of Mr. Rushdie, or the last of the implications of his writing.

CHAPTER FOUR

Nawal el Saadawi's Postmodern Feminist Critique of Islam

Chapter Three outlined the ways in which François Lyotard's critique of knowledge, his critique of metanarratives, impacts on Salman Rushdie's *The Satanic Verses*. This chapter takes Lyotard's anti-representational stance in a different direction. Like Rushdie, el Saadawi, too, takes issue with fundamentalist Islam. Unlike Rushdie, though, el Saadawi situates her postmodernist critique in women's lives. *The Fall of the Imam's* postmodern feminist critique addresses the issue of women's subordination within the system of patriarchal Islam. Specifically, it focuses on the negative valuation of woman as body. El Saadawi, physician, writer, and psychiatrist, brings together her knowledge and experience of body, voice, and mind to critique and displace a value system that represents women as inferior. To frame the discussion of woman as body and, subsequently the presentation of woman as voice/mind, I rely on French feminist Hélène Cixous and her theories of women's sexuality and women's writing. While it is true that Cixous' studies focus on desire and libidinal sexuality that is textualized, her theorising is useful in the gen-

eral context of theorising the body. With her analysis of patriarchal binary thought the following shows how the postmodern feminist critique of *The Fall of the Imam* advances through three critical zones: first, through the negative valuation of woman as body, next through the death of woman as body, and finally to the valuation of woman as voice/mind. El Saadawi follows Cixous insofar as she acknowledges the negative valuation of woman's body within Cixous' notions of patriarchal binary thought. Then, however, el Saadawi and Cixous part company. While Cixous allows the continuation of the body through space and time so that a female jouissance, an écriture feminine, can displace the patriarchal paradigm, el Saadawi moves in the opposite direction. She finds she must destroy that body which represents female subordination to make space for a feminist resistance of woman as voice/mind. Ultimately, in el Saadawi's revisioning, (her)story begins to replace (his)story.

At this juncture it is important, once again, to situate both 'postmodern' and 'feminism' in the present context. The debate surrounding the linkage of the two is far from univocal. It has both its supporters and its adversaries. Of the latter, critics like Seyla Benhabib feel that feminism and postmodernism are exclusive, that they are antithetical to each other. In her essay "Epistemologies of Postmodernism: A Rejoinder to Jean-François Lyotard" Benhabib points out that with the rejection of modern epistemology and representation comes a polytheism of values, a relativism, from which emanci-

pation, like that of a feminist agenda, cannot reckon. Further, she is suspicious that this polytheistic philosophy is not truly polytheistic, but one that privileges, once again, one domain of discourse and knowledge over others (107). Other critics like Christine Di Stefano bring other concerns to the debate. In her work "Dilemmas of Difference: Feminism, Modernity, and Postmodernism" De Stefano believes that a feminist politics based on collectivity is at odds with a postmodernism that calls both for a decentered self and a greater humbleness regarding truth claims. She adds that perhaps women are not in the same position as men to give up the Enlightenment project of modernism and all that it means, since it has been within the modern age that women's movements have made gains (63).

While it is true that such concerns do arise when one joins these two approaches to cultural discourse, it is also true that they need not be the only ways of conceptualising the marriage. Nancy Fraser and Linda Nicholson acknowledge the above concerns, but believe that a positive relationship can exist between feminism and postmodernism. They rightly point out that both have strengths to contribute to the other's weaknesses, and characterise the exchange as follows: while postmodernists offer sophisticated and persuasive criticisms of foundationalism and essentialism, their conceptions of social criticism tend to be anaemic. Conversely, while feminists offer robust conceptions of social criticism, they tend at times to lapse into foundationalism and essentialism (374). With regards to the first assertion, Fraser and

Nicholson's refiguring of Lyotard's formulations with feminist inquiry can be viewed as a refurbishing of his anaemic social criticism.

Lyotard's formulations begin with Philosophy. His postmodernist critique calls for an undermining of the privileged position of Philosophy as an overarching metanarrative that has the power to characterise and evaluate all other discourses contained within. This anti-foundational stance, in turn, changes the shape or character of social criticism. No longer grand, pervasive and universal, criticism becomes pragmatic, ad hoc, contextual, and local. In his scheme, since Philosophy does not ground social criticism, no place exists for social criticism based on large categories like gender, or, as Fraser and Nicholson write, "for critique of pervasive axes of stratification, for critique of broad-based relations of dominance and subordination along lines of gender, race, and class" (377). Of course, feminist endeavours reject such a view. Fraser and Nicholson say that Lyotard's formulations need to be altered in ways that would not sacrifice his commitment to antifoundationalism. They propose beginning not with Philosophy but with "the nature of the social object one wishes to criticize" (382). They contend that subordination of women to men in patriarchy is highly complex and capable of holding discussions of both large and small narratives, from ideology to dyadic speech situations, all without turning to essentialist foundationalism. They offer, rather, that *philosophies* need formulations. They characterise their union of feminism and postmodernism by theory that would be historical *and* attuned to cultural

specificity of different societies and periods, and to that of different groups within societies and periods (390). Moreover, their postmodern-feminist theory would be non-universalist, its focus cross-cultural, its mode of attention comparativist, attending to changes and contrasts instead of to covering laws. Indeed, its thrust would be to replace unitary notions of woman and feminine gender identity with plural and complexly constructed conceptions of social identity (391). In the frame of this thesis, then, their celebration of complexity and difference allows me to explore el Saadawi's critique of Islam from her feminist stance.

First, do Arab woman even have a feminist literary tradition, and if so, how does one situate Nawal el Saadawi's works? Arab women's literary tradition itself is as recent as the nineteenth century. Although they had a tremendous oral tradition of many centuries past, Arab women's literary tradition is as recent as the nineteenth century because women did not have access to reading and writing. This tradition, though, as short as it appears, has feminist thrusts. In *Opening the Gates: A Century of Arab Feminist Writing* M. Badran and M. Cooke provide a brief look at Arab women's education and their writing patterns, and tell how various essays, compendiums, speeches, poetry, short stories, biographical dictionaries, novels and autobiographies by women from the nineteenth century to today find spaces in the dominant male discourse to challenge patriarchal institutions and traditions. As Toril Moi tells us in *Sexual/Textual Politics: Feminist Literary Theory*,

feminist approaches to literature take the paths of recovering past voices of women, criticising images of women in writings by men, and creating more representative literature (Intro). And like women from other literary traditions, Arab women are taking a feminist approach to their tradition. According to Badran and Cooke, Arab women's literary tradition is recovering women's experiences of the past and creating new presents and futures (Intro).

Nawal el Saadawi is a committed contributor to a feminist Arab literary tradition and someone who rigorously challenges the patriarchal structure of Islam. In an interview with Fedwa Malti-Douglas and Allen Douglas in 1986 entitled "Reflections of a Feminist" el Saadawi describes her growing awareness of gender discrimination — from the inequalities within her family, to the inequalities in Arab society and Third World countries (*Gates* 395). She later tells critic Nancy Evans that her awareness of gender discrimination and patriarchy led outside her Egypt and the third world, to the inequalities within "the political, economic, and cultural system preponderant in most of the world" (144). While she generalises the local to the international, though, her commitment, she affirms in a profile done for the magazine *West Africa* is to Islam and she "writes in Arabic to reach her Arab people" (*West Africa* 3888). She considers herself both a writer and a feminist "because when you are a woman and when you are a writer, you reflect your agony" (*Gates* 401) and, she admits to critic Rosemary Clune in an article "Writing is Power,"

writing is communication by which [one] can change the world in which [one] lives (1735). In her own country, the Egyptian government considers el Saadawi's works subversive and bans much of her writing. She takes much of her work outside her own country to be published.

A brief look at her life and her feminist writings sufficiently highlights how her feminist interests imbue all facets of her life. From a diversity of roles, including those of physician, mother, militant advocate, public official, historian, and psychiatrist, she challenges the grand narrative of Islam from very public stances. For instance, her experiences in the public sphere as a physician, as Egypt's Director of Health Education in the Ministry of Health from 1958-1972, as economic director of the United Nation's African Training and Research Centre for Women from 1978-1980, as advisor for women's programs of the United Nation's Economic Commission from 1978-1980, as co-founder of the African Women's Association for Research and Development in 1977, as the first president of The Arab Women's Solidarity Association, as editor in chief of *Health* magazine from 1968-72, and as a practising psychiatrist have led her to explore the construction of Islamic patriarchy and its subordination of women, through many non-fiction texts like "Women and Sex" (1971), "Man and Sex" (1973), "Female is the Origin" (1975), "Woman and Psychological Conflict" (1976), *The Hidden Face of Eve: Women in the Arab World* (1980), *Memoirs from the Women's Prison* (1983), and "The Political Challenges Facing Arab Women at the End of the 20th Century" (1988).

Without a doubt, el Saadawi persistently analyses the political, economic and social nexus of Islam and the Arab woman's subordinate place from a plethora of public roles.

Concomitantly, one finds the same complex feminist analysis of patriarchal Islam and its subordination of women by el Saadawi the writer. Her fictional writing which perhaps can be considered initially a more private endeavour, takes the form of short stories, novels, plays, and autobiographies. Works like *Woman at Point Zero* (1975), *Searching* (1991), *God Dies by the Nile* (1974), *The Circling Song* (1989), *Two Women in One* (1975), *She Has No Place In Paradise* (1987), and *Death of an Ex-Minister* (1987) address those issues that touch women's lives, issues like bride price, arranged marriages, veiling, adultery, female circumcision, virginity, prostitution, and violence. *The Fall of the Imam* not only follows el Saadawi's feminist tradition but as, I argue earlier, draws upon a postmodern tradition. She locates her critique of the patriarchal metanarrative of Islam in a critique of woman as body, a tradition that is growing in eastern literary criticism around traditional encodings of women. Names like Evelyn Accad, Rose Ghurayyib, Leila Ahmed, Etel Adnan, Assia Djebar, Fedwa Malti-Douglas, Forugh Farukhzad, and Mona Mikhail, to name a few, problematize the patriarchal paradigm. In *The Fall of the Imam* el Saadawi, too, problematizes the patriarchal paradigm and its representation of woman as body, woman as subordinates. In her view, the Muslim representation of woman as body is nega-

tive and she sets out to destroy it in this novel. After the destruction, in the absence of woman as body, in the space she creates, el Saadawi sets in motion the tentative first steps of a revisioning of Muslim women: she sets in place a paradigm of woman as voice and mind.

El Saadawi's critique of woman as body, intersects with French feminist H. Cixous's work of the 1970s and 1980s. Cixous led feminist literary criticism into new areas of investigation with her linkages between sexuality and textuality and her articulations of desire and sexuality within the literary text itself. Her most well known concept is *écriture féminine*, a term that explores literary production through a unique woman's language. She questions the 'feminine condition' by insisting on active erotic liberation through writing the body. What is useful here for framing the discussion of el Saadawi's process in *The Fall of the Imam* is that the path to an *écriture féminine* begins with Cixous' analysis of all discourse which she sees as 'patriarchal binary thought'. In an essay "Where is she?" Cixous talks about how discourse (reading, speaking, literature, philosophy, criticism) is organised in a system of binary oppositions that corresponds to the biological unit, Man/Woman:

Activity/Passivity
 Sun/Moon
 Culture/Nature
 Day/Night
 Father/Mother
 Head/Emotions
 Intelligible/Sensitive
 Logos/Pathos (*New French Feminisms* 90)

The binary oppositions play major roles in the patriarchal value system where each opposition can be analysed as a hierarchy where the 'feminine' side is always seen as the negative, powerless moment. Anne Game's reading of Cixous is that Cixous's critique opposes what she sees as an 'economy of sameness': woman is not the same as man, therefore, in the hierarchical paradigm, her difference is constituted negatively (82). For Cixous, the biological opposition of Male/Female is used to construct a series of negative 'feminine' values which then are imposed on and confused with 'female'. No matter which binary couple one chooses, all thought, according to Cixous, is caught up in an endless series of hierarchical binary oppositions with its inevitable positive/negative evaluation as the underlying paradigm. Within the binary oppositions of presence/absence, women are always absence:

Theory of culture, theory of society, the ensemble of symbolic systems — art, religion, family, language — everything elaborates the same systems. And the movement by which each opposition is set up to produce meaning is the movement by which the couple is destroyed. A universal battlefield....And we per-

ceive that the 'victory' always amounts to the same thing: it is hierarchized. The hierarchization subjects the entire conceptual organization to man. A male privilege. (*New French Feminisms* 91)

Not only woman, but woman as body is valued negatively within Cixous' paradigm of hierarchical binary oppositions. We shall see in the subsequent discussion how Cixous recovers woman as body as the basis for her écriture feminine. Here, though, let us see how woman as body is negatively evaluated in *The Fall of the Imam*, the first step in my three part analysis of el Saadawi's postmodern feminist text. Woman and her body figure very prominently in *The Fall of the Imam*. We are told that the most important aspect of the male/female binary is "the ownership of women's bodies" (*Imam* 136) and that "woman is wretched and possesses nothing but a body to be sold for the price of a meal" (26). More precisely, woman as body is objectified in that the body is not whole but is fractured and fragmented making her, more precisely, woman as body fragments. For instance, religion creates and endorses the myth that women were created second to man from a twisted rib, rendering them both faithless and mindless (124). Another example is that the cultural heritage of the East bequeaths the notion that beauty for woman is not a whole body but is parts and pieces of a non-existent whole. The Imam's ideal virgin, like King Shahrayar's, is a pastiche of a slender waist, opulent breasts, dense black eyelashes, small head, large buttocks, sweet smelling breath, face/hair/teeth/eyes white as milk, eyelashes/eyebrows/eyes/hair

black as night, rosy-red tongue/ lips/cheek/flesh, well-rounded legs/wrists/haunches/belly, large brow/forehead/eyes/breasts, small mouth/nose/ears/vagina (114). Likewise, the women in his present cultural milieu are also pastiches of body pieces:

Her look moved away from him to the legal wives standing in line, their ample **bodies** clothed in mourning black, their plump **hands** clasped over their **hearts**, their **feet** shod in high-heeled shoes, their **legs** pressed together....They looked alike except for a badge on their **shoulders** or a brooch on their **breasts**, for their features seemed to have been rubbed away, their **heads** small...their **haunches** prominently displayed, **bodies** all flesh without spirit, thin **lips**...**eyes** bulging...mouths opened.
(emphasis added, 167)

Symbolically, woman are in the image of animals. Over and over their corporeality is that of animals, not human. Bint Allah is like a cat (14), a vicious tiger (124), and a sheep crawling on the ground being led to butchery (137). Likewise, Nemat Allah is a bleating sacrificial lamb that strains at the rope that ties her forelegs (20). In general, all women are animals, dogs (27), snakes (37), and ants (77), and sometimes, even, as less valued than an animal. In the following passage, woman is a water buffalo, that lazy and brooding beast of burden. But, culturally, even the body of that water buffalo is more valued than woman's body:

and the she-buffalo has a black skin and four legs, and I could see her eyelids drooping with pleasure as she floated lazily. Af-

ter a while she climbs out of the water on to the bank, moving with a relaxed ambling gait towards the edge of a field where she stands munching fodder slowly, swinging her tail, her ears listening intently to the wheeze of the water-wheel, her brooding eyes following the woman tied to it with a rope of hemp, as she goes round and round blindfolded. A man walks behind her switching his stick over her buttocks every time she halts to take her breath. A gasp of surprise escapes my lips. A woman turning a water-wheel while the buffalo rests? They said: Here we follow the laws of offer and demand. A buffalo costs more on the market than a woman, so a man can have four wives, but he can only afford one buffalo. (5)

Such negative valuation of woman as body in Cixous' patriarchal binary thought system brings Cixous to her next step, that of revaluing woman's body through a woman's writing. Cixous keeps the corporeal, albeit woman must rethink the body, sexuality and the rapport between the sexual and the cultural. In her now famous essay "Laugh of the Medusa" she explains the necessity of writing the body:

Almost everything is yet to be written by women about femininity: about their sexuality, that is, its infinite and mobile complexity, about their eroticization, sudden turn-ons of a certain miniscule-immense area of their bodies; not about destiny, but about the adventure of such and such a drive...by smashing yokes and censors, she lets it articulate the profusion of meanings that run through...will make the old single-grooved mother tongue reverberate with more than one language. (*New French Feminisms* 256)

Woman must be corporeal, must write with and through her body in order to deconstruct the logocentrism and phallogentrism of male discourse. We are told that woman's writing must be not only a re-appropriation of femininity through rethinking the body, but Cixous' *écriture féminine* is that woman must write with her own body, must write herself into history. Cixous undoes the logocentric ideology by salvaging woman as body and proclaiming woman's body as the source of life, power and energy, and hails the advent of a new feminine language that ceaselessly subverts these patriarchal binary schemes where women are oppressed and silenced. She celebrates the heterogeneous difference of the body, the *différance* that I talked of in chapter one where multiple significations exist to displace the ideological system of binary logic. Acknowledging *différance* means that meaning is never truly present but only constructed through the potentially endless process of referring to other signifiers. Hence, the construction of woman as inferior is meaningless. The poetics of writing that is feminine is that women's writing is the voice of the eternal mother that comes from the all mother's milk and which is an absolute activity of all women ("Where is She?" 170-230). *Écriture féminine*, then, is writing and texts that work on the difference, that strive in the direction of difference, that struggle to undermine the dominant binary ideology to revel in the pleasures of open-ended textuality.⁸

⁸ Many feminist critics find Cixous' concept of *écriture féminine* problematic. While the first part of her theorizing is valuable in that it eschews the essentialism of patriarchy that defines woman as body and as inferior, critics like Hélène Vivienne Wenzel believes that Cixous, herself, re-creates

In contrast, el Saadawi does not keep the body. She destroys woman as body, over and over, to rid consciousness of the unequal paradigm, and to make room for a revisioning of woman as voice. There is no 'eternal mother', no 'mother's milk', only orphans, prostitutes, and the dead. The cycle of violence moves from a local violence to a total violence, from mutilation to death. Tongues are cut out (1, 2), hands are cut off (2), bellies are stoned (10), children's bodies are sexually abused (16), necks are strangled (16), and bodies are beaten (14). Then, from the beginning to the end of the text, death destroys the collectivity of Bint Allah/Nemat Allah/Gawaher, over and over. Their body is stoned to death, shot to death, stabbed to death, beaten to death, raped to death, and even turns to stone and dies. As many times as it resurrects, it dies. The Imam would even cannibalistically devour Bint Allah's body both to possess it, and to make it cease to exist both in time and space:

that essentialism. Wenzel summarizes current pessimism towards Cixous' *écriture féminine* by pointing out that it appears that in Cixous' scheme of things, woman goes back to her biology:

Rather than the male writer, we now have the female writer returning to the cosmic womb (or the cosmic vulva), denying in this retreat the fullness of her human, undifferentiated potential. The woman writer thus creates a superwoman to replace the superman, substitutes female genitalia for the phallus/penis, and reproduction for creativity. It must then be asked: How subversive is such a discourse? (269)

Slightly different criticisms come from two other areas: lesbian writer Monique Wittig believes that *écriture's* bisexual basis cannot account for a writing of the lesbian body, and materialist feminist Toril Moi believes that Cixous' utopia remains in the realm of the imaginary.

Now nothing could extinguish the fire which had been aroused in him except one thing, to lay her at his feet and devour her like a vulture eats up the flesh leaving the bones behind. He sat in front of her sucking her bones, cracking them like sticks of sugar-cane and extracting the marrow from the inside with his tongue and lips. She watched him as she would watch a sheep fattened for the Big Feast enter the butcher's shop....No matter how much he ate he was never satisfied....She handed him bone after bone, then gave him the shoulder blade followed by the rump and the spleen. (123)

Why such decisiveness? In the words of the Great Writer's wife, "a sign of maturity is the death of the body and the revival of the mind" (129) and this is the passion of the feminist revisioning of *The Fall of the Imam*: the patriarchal binary paradigm is destroyed to make room for the revisioning of woman as voice which begins with hope and language. The irony of the above passage is that although the Imam is the perpetrator of the crime, Bint Allah herself, ala el Saadawi, gives away the body, gives up the paradigms of woman as body.

When the body dies, without regret we are told (143), it is not the end because a spirit of the mind lives, a spirit that will find its voice in a revisioning of women's lives. The new spirit is beyond possession (175) and it is fearful to the patriarchy — nobody could look Bint Allah, the spirit, in the face (80). This spirit/mind "does not give up" (8), and is "like river water, pure and flowing and crystal clear" (143).

Woman as voice is a powerful theme which begins with the issue of language. Women inscribe their experiences through language, language names realities. El Saadawi herself acknowledges that Arabic can be problematic when it comes to giving shape to women's realities. In her interview with Fedwa-Malti Douglas and Allen Douglas, el Saadawi claims that the male-oriented nature of the Arabic language creates problems for her and her translators because of the feminist content of her books. In her 1988 essay "The Political Challenges Facing Arab Women at the End of the 20th Century" she talks about how the Arabic male pronouns alienate women (18). She gives two examples. In one of her books, she had written '*al-insan wa-kannahu...*' [man, as though he] and her translator did not know if she should use 'he' or 'she' in the passage because of el Saadawi's '*al-insan*' [man]. The translator was much confused by the masculine pronoun. The second she gives comes from a speech by President Mubarak. Mubarak began a speech with "Misr al-rijal — aqwa min khazain al-mal" [The Egypt of men is stronger than treasure houses of wealth]. El Saadawi confronted him about the absence of women in his statement, saying he could have said "Misr al-rijal waal-nisa?" [Egypt of Men and of Women] (*Gates* 402). To el Saadawi, then, Arabic alienates women, and because her novel *The Fall of the Imam* is a book that so concerns women, Arabic is highly problematic and she explains that she attempts to break through the language barrier, with careful

writing, whenever she can.⁹ Asked whether she intends to end up with a woman's literary language, contrary to Cixous and her *écriture féminine*, el Saadawi says she has no wish to create a woman's language, only to create a more reflective voice concerning language (402).

And what of the language of the Quran? El Saadawi is firm that it, too, is male-oriented (402). Agreeing with el Saadawi, Keddie and Beck, in their work *Women in the Muslim World*, propose that most exegesis, commentaries, interpretations, even translations, codify into law women's subordinate position (26).¹⁰ While some critics believe Quranic language can be equitable and universal, equality is only a potential not realized by most interpreters.¹¹

⁹ An example of the problematic nature of the language and women's strategies to deal with it, in her article "Defying Submission" el Saadawi uses the example of 'Noun'. She says: "'Noun' is the 23rd letter of the Arabic alphabet and is added to nouns and verbs to make them 'feminine.' Hence the use by Egyptian feminists of 'N' or 'Noun' as a slogan to symbolise their struggle" (16). Indeed, she points out that *Noun* is the name of a quarterly journal founded in 1989 by the Arab Women Solidarity Association (AWSA) to explore, analyze, and advance issues pertaining to Arab women's lives.

¹⁰ See for example Fatima Mernissi's *Beyond the Veil* (1975) which talks of the traditional Muslim view of women as inferior and those exegetes who render Quranic messages of men's superiority; also see the difficulties of confrontations between new interpretations and old in Debbie J. Gerner's "Roles in Transition: The Evolving Position of Women in Arab-Islamic Countries" in *Muslim Women* (1984), Freda Hussain, editor; and finally Safia Iqbal's *Woman and Islamic Law* (1988) discusses Islamic laws that are based on the Quran's sensitivity to women's incapacitating biological rhythms that keep her from fulfilling roles outside the home.

¹¹ To demonstrate the power of interpretation, Amina Wadud-Muhsin expresses her belief that the Quran is potentially a text that espouses a view of the sexes that is equal. In her essay "Understanding the Implicit Qur'anic Parameters to the Role of Woman in the Modern Context" Wadud-Muhsin translates numerous passages of the Quran to demonstrate its basic principle of social justice. She maintains that many passages like the ones that follow fail to distinguish between male or female when it comes to determining the worth or value of a person and/or their deeds: "Lo! I suffer not the work of any worker, male or female, to be lost" (3:195), "Whoever does right, whether male or female, and is a believer, (all) such will enter the Garden" (40:39), "Unto men a fortune from that which they have earned and unto women a fortune from that which

Continued on Following Page

The reality is that traditional sacred texts were written by men, and women's experiences and opinions were under-represented as is the bulk of today's interpretations (402).

Looking at *The Fall of the Imam* we see that el Saadawi privileges language, the word, and its infinite possibilities in the semiotic system of signification. Bint Allah taps that power in a manner that redefines her from woman as body, to woman as mind. For Bint Allah, language frames her story. On the opening page she talks of "alphabets, letters and words" (1), and on the closing page she is in the company of "newspapers and files" (175). Importantly, language allows her to name herself: "Before the letters could fade from my mind, before my mind became a blank, I said: I am not the child of sin, I am Bint Allah" (1). Once named, she questions her reality, no easy task in a culture where a woman's tongue can be cut out for questioning the laws of religion and state. As a child she asks how a daughter can kill her father (9), how a woman can be stoned to death if God is judge (15), and how the skin of kings is white and that of slaves black (59). In her youth and young adulthood she asks why the criminal is let free and the victim killed (2, 121), why God would be angry if people don't know what crimes they have committed (6), and why the face is shameful and should not be seen by man

they have earned" (4:32), "We created you male and female and have made you nations and tribes that you may know one another. Indeed, the most noble of you from Allah's perspective is whoever (he or she) has the most *taqwa* (piousness)" (49:13) (Wadud-Muhsin 128). Unfortunately, in the scheme of interpretations and laws, Wadud-Muhsin's is not the norm.

or God (23). Her challenge through the word moves to a challenge of narratives, to (his)story where she begins to tell the stories of her life and that of her cultural heritage. These stories are (her)story, narratives fashioned by women about women and it is not surprising that Bint Allah should be a feminist social historian. In her own words, el Saadawi, herself, is a "historical social feminist" (*West Africa* 3888) because she is committed to undermining a fundamentalist patriarchal history. In *The Hidden Face of Eve* she chronicles many female figures in Arab herstory and she admits that she is greatly inspired by the female characters in the stories of the ancient east and insists that feminism is embedded in that herstory (3888). It is little wonder, then, that her preface in *The Fall of the Imam* acknowledges her endeavour to 'unsilence' the voices of women like Shahbani Shiraz, Fatima Tag El Sirr, Iitidal Mahmoud, and Collette Itani. Her protagonist, Bint Allah, begins recording her life in the orphanage. She writes letters to someone imaginary so that her reality as she writes it will not be lost but will be set down in herstory (49).

Bint Allah, however, is a blend of voices. In postmodern fashion, the female personas are not one but many and it seems that the text is in constant jeopardy of flying apart because of its multiplicity of voices. Consider the shifts in narration, sometimes 'I', sometimes 'she', that creates confusion and an incomplete subject center. In chapter three "I Hear My Mother Calling" Bint Allah, 'I', begins the story with the Bint Allah who is hunted, shot,

killed, and resurrected. The story of the hunt for Bint Allah continues for the next two and a half pages until, suddenly, the narration shifts to 'her' who is being tied with hemp and stoned to death (10). After two paragraphs, the narration continues with a mixture of 'I' and 'her' to the chapter's end. The breaks and inconsistencies are more the norm than the exception. Add to this the constant deaths and reappearances of the female characters, and the confusion endorses the conclusion that female personas are not whole, not centered. However, a feminist reading of the personas rescues the parts from their explosive trajectories. The females can be revisioned as a collectivity that congeal for one brief historical (and certainly poetic) moment in Bint Allah. She connects to the women of her past, present, and future through violence, and gives voice for herself (selves) through a new language.

From words to herstory, *The Fall of the Imam* undermines the "cultural heritage of the Arab world" (1, 111, 112, 115), in the words of the Imam, by revisioning of the tale of *One Thousand and One Nights* and woman's subordinate role. Before I look at how el Saadawi appropriates the tale of King Shahrayar, perhaps a brief summary of the King Shahrayar tale is in order. The following summary is taken from Samar Attar and Gerhard Fischer's 1991 essay "Promiscuity, Emancipation, Submission: The Civilising Process and the Establishment of a Female Role Model in the Frame-Story of *1001 Nights*." The opening tale of *Alf Layla wa-Layla* begins with two kings, two brothers, who have unfaithful wives. The women betray their husbands by

making love to their slaves once the kings are absent from their palaces. In their horror and disappointment after their wives' promiscuity, the brothers journey outside their capital cities, seeking solace in each other's company. On the outskirts of civilization, under a tree, they come across a demonic monster who emerges from the ocean carrying a box. Luckily the monster goes to sleep under the tree which the brothers have hidden in. Out of the box emerges a beautiful woman who is being kept prisoner by the demon who abducted her on her wedding day. He keeps her locked in another box at the bottom of the sea, fearful that she might betray him. The beautiful woman, upon noticing the brothers, forces them to descend and make love to her. She threatens to awaken her monstrous companion if the men do not submit to her desire. The kings implore her in vain; the Box Woman answers their protest by quoting the authority of poets who have written about the vital force of woman's sexuality that knows no bounds and that cannot be kept in check. The woman forces the kings a second time to make love to her, then demands their seal rings, adding them proudly to a string of 570 rings from previous conquests. After the kings return home, King Shahrayar decides to take revenge against womanhood by instituting a reign of terror which requires that he marry and rape a virgin every night then kill her in the morning. After depleting his resources of virgins in the land, the King orders his Vizier to find yet another. Enter Shahrazad who, as the last virgin, and against her father's expressed cautionary wisdom, is able to be the king's lover for three

years, each day hidden away in the recesses of his castle, and each night, for 1001 nights, telling the King story after story, never ending them, to save her life. After the three years she bears him three sons and ends the reign of terror (4).

Attar and Fischer also provide a summary of how the tale is traditionally interpreted, agreeing with critics like Marcuse and Elias that this is a tale of the process of civilization and the domination of society by patriarchy, and, I submit, its 'binary oppositions':

There is the contrast between the city, as the place of an emerging civilization, the domain of man/men and law and order, and the natural environment suggesting life and fertility. There is also the ocean, home of the Box Woman and clearly associated with the power of female sexuality, which is seemingly beyond the reach of civilizing efforts: a force of nature of tremendous power and an ever present threat. There is, furthermore, the traditional linkage of sexuality/woman and sexuality/evil, of the sexual instinct of women as a demonic, monstrous force which needs to be caged, locked in, kept in check. This last aspect, in particular, presents a factor of legitimation to ensure that the "civilized" society which is to arise after this encounter is to be dominated by men. The civilization process must then be interpreted within the context of a patriarchal society. It is a society seen, as a matter of course, from the perspective of men who establish values and consolidate their control over women, i.e. the society ruled by the brother-kings who emerge from their

position of victim, betrayed and sexually exploited by women, to claim a position of unquestioned power and dominance.¹²

What form does the tale of King Shahrayar and Shahrazad take in *The Fall of the Imam*? First, it speaks to the west's appropriation of the tale, to the orientalist nature of its (his)tory. We see how the tale captivates the Philosopher with "strange enchantment" where he fantasizes about being King Shahrayar (98). Like Shahrayar, he dreams of having the power to control women's sexuality and to control their very lives, "My heart beat to the chink of gold, and when I looked at myself in the mirror I saw myself living like King Shahrayar raping a virgin each night and killing her at dawn" (101). Recalling that the Philosopher is a westerner who transplants himself to Arab culture, his romantic view of this "exotic" land and its virgins to rape is orientalist; after all, he sees himself as Shahrayar before he even sets foot in his temporary adoptive eastern locale. Next, the Imam's flirtation with the tale is in a chapter entitled "Reviving our Cultural Heritage," the title itself suggestive of a critique of the recent wave of reviving cultural heritages,

¹² Attar and Fischer themselves recover the herstory of the *1001 Nights* in two ways. First, the Box Woman is never "civilized" or changed into a different woman. Her sexual energy and pleasure remain always a possibility of delight. Second, Shahrazad does not correspond to the typical role image of the feminine woman who lacks an identity" (7). She has a name, she knows the poets, the sciences, the arts, she has wit and humor, and she is independent, standing against the wishes and logic of her father. She uses her ingenuity to deal with and dominate King Shahrayar until he becomes her lover and the father of her sons. As Attar and Fischer extol, Shahrazad embodies beauty, charm, wisdom and wit, love and submission, education, intelligence and persuasive skill, persistence and purposeful action, an exemplary paradigm of 'woman' of a thousand years ago" (9).

Mahmut Mutman's fundamentalism I spoke of earlier, that wishes once again to entrench traditionalist practices like veiling through force. In an 1990 article entitled "Defying Submission" el Saadawi admonishes such moves: "Islamic fundamentalists pressurise government by political, economic and propaganda means, as well as acts of terrorism, to implement Islamic law, which would veil women and further reduce their chances of equal opportunity in society" (16). The Imam of our story knows that the storyline does not/must not include an Imam, God's wisest and purest servant, so he carefully removes his face and becomes simply a man who is capable of pride, adultery and violence. Like the original tale, the story of the Box Woman follows with the Imam in the role of King Shahrayar, and again like the original tale, the Imam/King finds his wife in bed with her lover and cuts off her head and the heads of all his wives and all virgins. The original tale of violence and retribution, of subordination and fear transposes itself onto the present day narrative but in the process, our present day narrative takes its own twists. The Imam's violence and brutality do not abate after three years but continue for twenty years, beyond the belief of his people, while his corruptness leads him to rob the state coffers to buy himself the very best of virgins. And instead of Shahrazad, we have Bint Allah who faces a present day challenge of destroying the notion of woman as body: "I must either save my life or I must die for my sisters. I must deliver them from the tyrant for all time" (118). Although Shahrazad enjoyed a brief time of power with lan-

guage, her final closure was that of wife and mother, woman as body.¹³ Bint Allah, on the other hand, may lose her body, her life, but she saves her spirit.

The telling of the story is also significant. In the initial version, Attar and Fischer remind us of the encyclopaedic dimension of the *1001 Nights* whereby many writers collected a variety of stories into a montage. However, given the patriarchal thrust of the stories as discussed above and given the plausibility that males, not females, were the educated, it is easy to surmise that men were scribes preserving patriarchal values. Attar and Fischer ask us to consider the poem put into the mouth of the Box Woman which warns of the 'wiles of female wits':

Rely not on women;
Trust not to their hearts,
Whose joys and who sorrows
Are hung to their parts! (14)

Contrary to the above patriarchal narrators, in *The Fall of the Imam* the written, male perspective is subverted by a female oral tradition, recalling, as it were, my earlier discussion about the long tradition of Arab women's oral tradition. Orality brings an immediacy and an intimacy between teller and audience. Both characteristics act as catalysts in the power of learning. In

¹³ For a discussion of Shahrazad's brief power with words, see *Woman's Body, Woman's Word* by Fedwa Malti-Douglas. While Shahrazad uses language to subvert the violence of Shahrayar, in the end, Malti-Douglas maintains, Shahrazad loses that power when the discourse returns again to her body: she becomes wife and mother, thus 'saving' Shahrayar, the heterosexual couple, and the patriarchal order. Hers is a 'woman as body' closure.

our story, since we have a strong female storyteller and a female audience, we have the subversion of the traditional patriarchal story of Shahrayar and Shahrazad. The central storyteller is Siti Al Haja, an old grandmother who gathers the children around her and tells her version of the *1001 Nights* in a chapter entitled "Statutory Treachery," a title that alludes to the ensuing revisioning. The tale is *her* story, *her* tale, told in *her* voice (58/59). In her stories, she endows women with powers of sorcery to counter the power of men's violence. Also, she uses the stories as a gender consciousness-raising for the female listeners. For example, the story of King Shahrayar's encounter with the Box Woman is recast into an act of his infidelity, with the words "The husband left the wife to go to another woman" (59). Also, she reveals that patriarchal Islam is responsible for women's subordination. She says that King Shahrayar/his father/God/the Imam is/are culpable for casting women into the role of the devil: "...women are born treacherous like their mother Eve...the treachery of men is allowable by divine law, as God Himself said" (59). The orality of Bint Allah's/Siti Al Haja's storytelling is that it allows for immediate challenge by the thinking audience. Unlike the Philosopher who reads the tale as an orientalist bookish notion of the exotic, and unlike the Imam who fantasizes in his mind about himself as King Shahrayar, Siti Al Haja and her audience breathe the stories together. When she talks of King Shahrayar's betrayal, Bint Allah, woman as mind, interrupts the story with questions about the contradictions and she is initiated into the knowledge of

oppression based on gender and colour: "But the King was betraying his wife with a black woman slave" (59). The intimacy and security created by the bond between the grandmother storyteller and Bint Allah allow the message of self-hatred to fall by the wayside. In the end, as T. Minh-ha declares, the intimacy of the storytelling is itself palpable knowledge:

The world's earliest archives or libraries were the memories of women. Patiently transmitted from mouth to ear, body to body, hand to hand. In the process of storytelling, speaking and listening refer to realities that do not involve just the imagination. The speech is seen, heard, smelled, tasted, and touched. (121)

From the germinations of a word to the creations of stories, Siti Al Haja and Bint Allah's discursive experiences refashion history into herstory. They leave behind Islam's negative valuation of woman as body and begin a positive picture of woman as mind and spirit. Undoubtedly el Saadawi, too, will continue to spin stories that question her culture's subordination of women. Her various experiences as psychiatrist, doctor, mother, activist and writer, in the words of Fedwa Malti-Douglas in *Woman's Body, Woman's Word*, place her in a privileged position to explore the relationship between science and art, body and mind (108).

CHAPTER FIVE

Conclusion

Today, as postmodernism makes its way into discourses beyond its European nascence, its shape is changed, its focus is shifted and its trajectory is unpredictable, as should be the case in postmodern fashion. Entering the world of Eastern studies, many critics use its malleable nature to explore a multitude of issues. For instance, Edward Said speaks to a re-invention of history, Michael Fischer and Mehdi Abedi talk of perspectival truths, Akbar Ahmed addresses the creation of Islam by global media and Nasrin Rahimieh discusses postmodern devices in Salman Rushdie's first novel, *Grimus*. All agree that the usefulness of postmodernism's life is far from over, that its implications for Eastern studies have only begun. This thesis has added to this discussion by looking at how postmodernism plays a role in both the form and content of Nawal el Saadawi's *The Fall of the Imam* and Salman Rushdie's *The Satanic Verses*.

Specifically, postmodernism's crisis of representation problematizes the notion of a stable, single reality which surfaces in postmodern writing as a crisis in world vs worlds. Literary theorist Brian McHale believes that post-

modernism's anti-representational stance challenges literary ontology and that postmodern fiction creates heterotopic zones as opposed to one *true* world. In the heterotopian spaces of *The Satanic Verses* and *The Fall of the Imam* not one but many worlds/zones exist. One moves through permeable borders of many zones, from dream to fantasy, from the world of the living to the world of the dead, and from today to the beginning of time, asking the ontological question "Where am I." The postmodern form of the novels create uncertainty and unpredictability with narrative devices like mirrors, labyrinths, repetitions, obsolete time, and multiple or non-endings; with narrative characterizations like mythification, fictionalization, and fragmentation; and with narrative geographies like mercurial not-London, 'the desert', nightmares, and dreams within dreams all which thrust the issue of ontology front and center to question status and reliability of one *true* world.

The crisis of representation is useful to Rushdie and el Saadawi's texts in another way: both question Islam's claim to a singular Truth. Acknowledging the rise in religious fundamentalism, Rushdie and el Saadawi feel it necessary to address that fundamentalism in their fiction. Critiquing such a metanarrative as Islam, however, comes with certain costs to their individual freedoms: Rushdie is still in hiding, perhaps forever, and el Saadawi, for the time being, anyways, cannot publish in her own country, cannot hold public office, and must be under twenty-four guard in her own home to ensure her safety. For Rushdie, the grand narrative of Islam does not admit heterogeneity or contradictions, and *The Sa-*

tanic Verses criticizes the unified and absolute authority of the interpreters of Islamic doctrine, contests and undermines Muhammad's sacred nature, and takes issue with the belief in the uncreated nature of the Quran. While Rushdie asks questions and casts doubt on a fundamentalist Islam that he believes is coercive and intolerant of difference, el Saadawi's feminist perspective takes issue with Islam's subordination of women. Specifically *The Fall of the Imam* destroys Islam's negative imaging of woman as body. Time after time, the body is destroyed so that an alternative representation of women can exist. To supplant the image of woman as body, el Saadawi fashions the image of woman as mind and voice. Words by and for women emerge to create stories by and for women so that eventually a social history emerges in the form of herstory that subverts the traditions of history. El Sadawi's is a postmodern feminist critique, while Rushdie's is a postmodern critique, both very important for the face of Islam today.

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